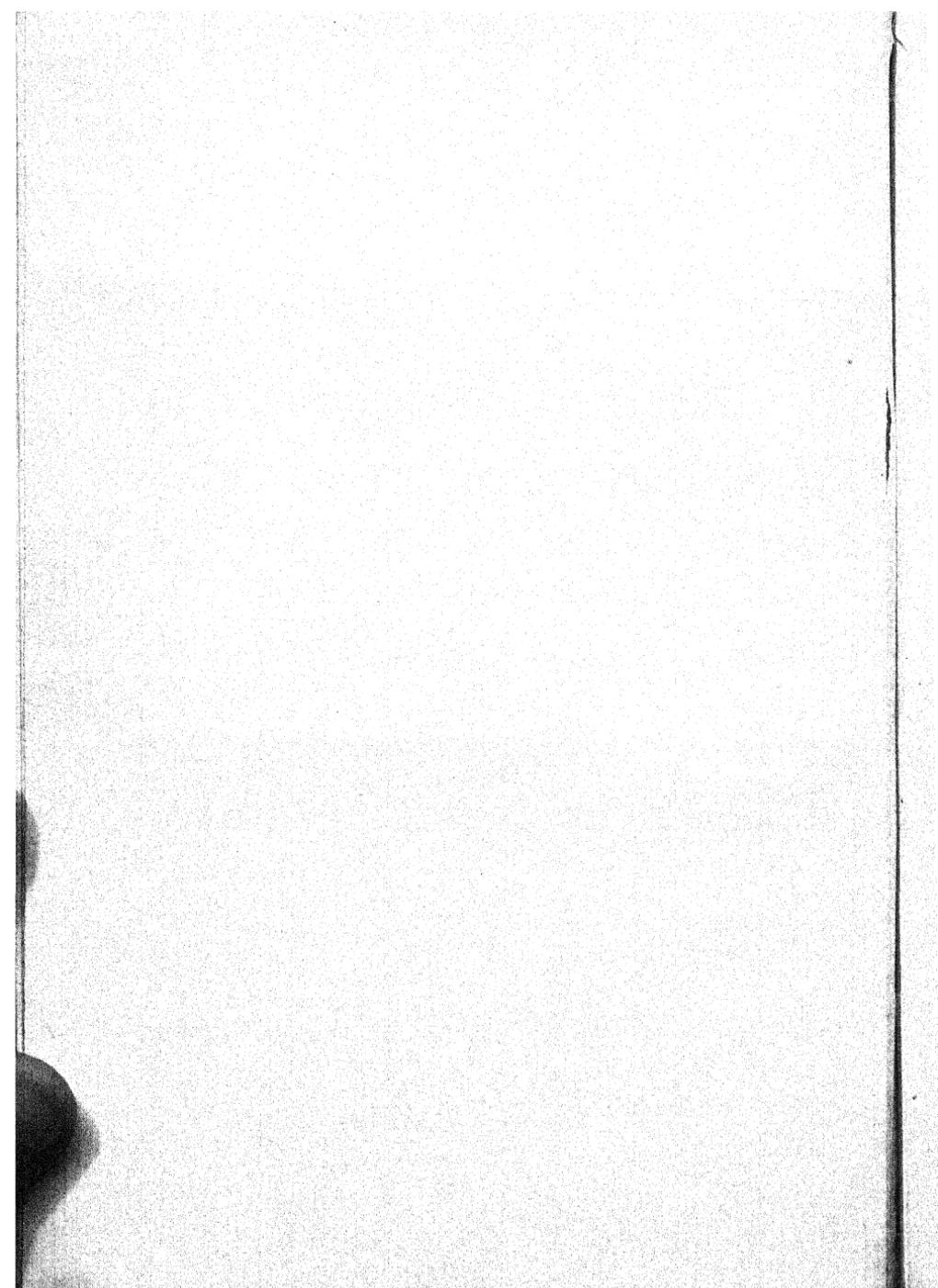


AN  
APPROACH TO THE  
TEACHING OF JESUS





# AN APPROACH TO THE TEACHING OF JESUS

## THE QUILLIAN LECTURES

EMORY UNIVERSITY

1946

## ERNEST CADMAN COLWELL



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# AN APPROACH TO THE TEACHING OF JESUS

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## FOREWORD

For some years I have taught a course for seminary students on "The Teaching of Jesus." Most of that course consists of introducing the student to the books in which the rich results of scholarly study are presented to the learned world. But a part of the course has come to be peculiarly my own—lectures in which the quotations are largely illustrations.

When my alma mater asked me to deliver the Quillian Lectures, I decided to write out in fuller form those particular studies which are in this real sense my own. The result is a very partial and lop-sided treatment of the teaching of Jesus. My only defense is that it is mine and that the aspects I have ignored are adequately treated elsewhere. The Bibliography contains reference to these more comprehensive works. It is my hope that these lectures will serve as an approach to the teaching of Jesus. This approach will be effective only if the reader turns to serious and continued study of the Gospels and of the supplementary material that critical scholarship has provided.

I am indebted to many colleagues, past and present. I do not list them here; for this book will

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add no luster to their names, and they know that I know what I owe to them. The affirmations in this volume are my own.

My desire in writing has been to make the reality that I have seen in the historic Jesus vividly present today. With this in mind I have included little scholarly baggage; I have made unqualified statements; I have quoted literary criticism and poetry—worst of all, some verses of my own. Yet they were born in, from, and for this study; they belong to it.

This book is designed primarily for Protestant religious workers—ministers and laymen—with whom I worked for a score of years. It is nonetheless appropriate that it should begin with some verses addressed to the modern man who is skeptical as to the significance of the historical Jesus.

### TO A MODERN DOUBTING THOMAS

You would see the marks of the Roman scourge,  
And the pits where the nails were driven?  
They are all hidden under fresh wounds.

Much more than forty lashes have I borne since Calvary;  
Blows aimed at striking labor have bruised my body sore;  
I've known the torture of my kinsmen by the gentile mob;

## FOREWORD

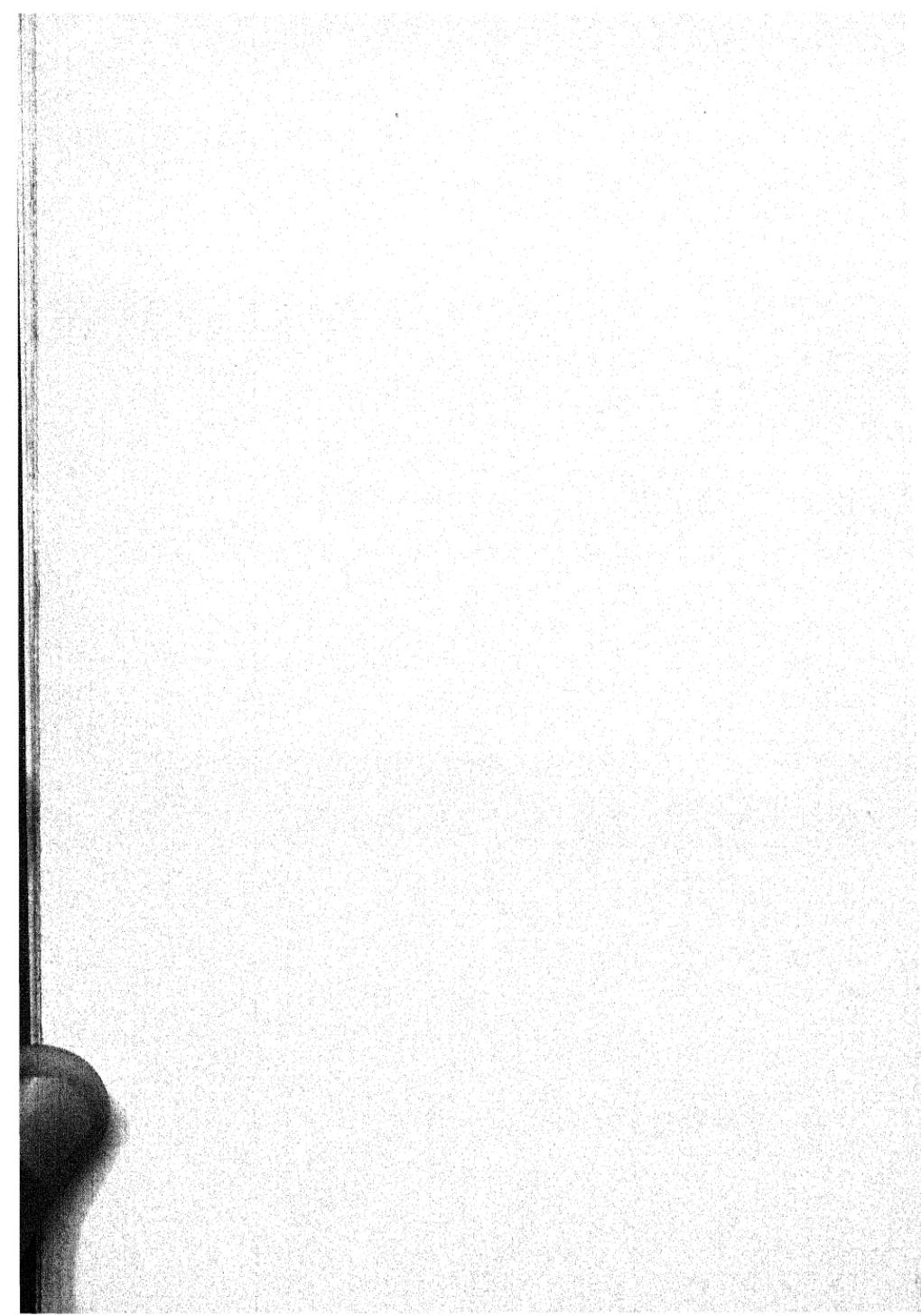
My back is raw from lashings by heroes, masked, at  
night;  
Wherever man was beaten, I was whipped.

You see this scar? 'Twas a bayonet in Flanders.  
You eye this bruise? A slave's chain pinched me there.  
My shoulders stoop? Under the heavy load of labor.

You would see the marks of the Roman scourge,  
And the pits where the nails were driven?  
They are all hidden under fresh wounds.<sup>1</sup>

ERNEST CADMAN COLWELL

<sup>1</sup> Published under the title "Jesus of Nazareth" in *Christendom*, I (1936), 443.



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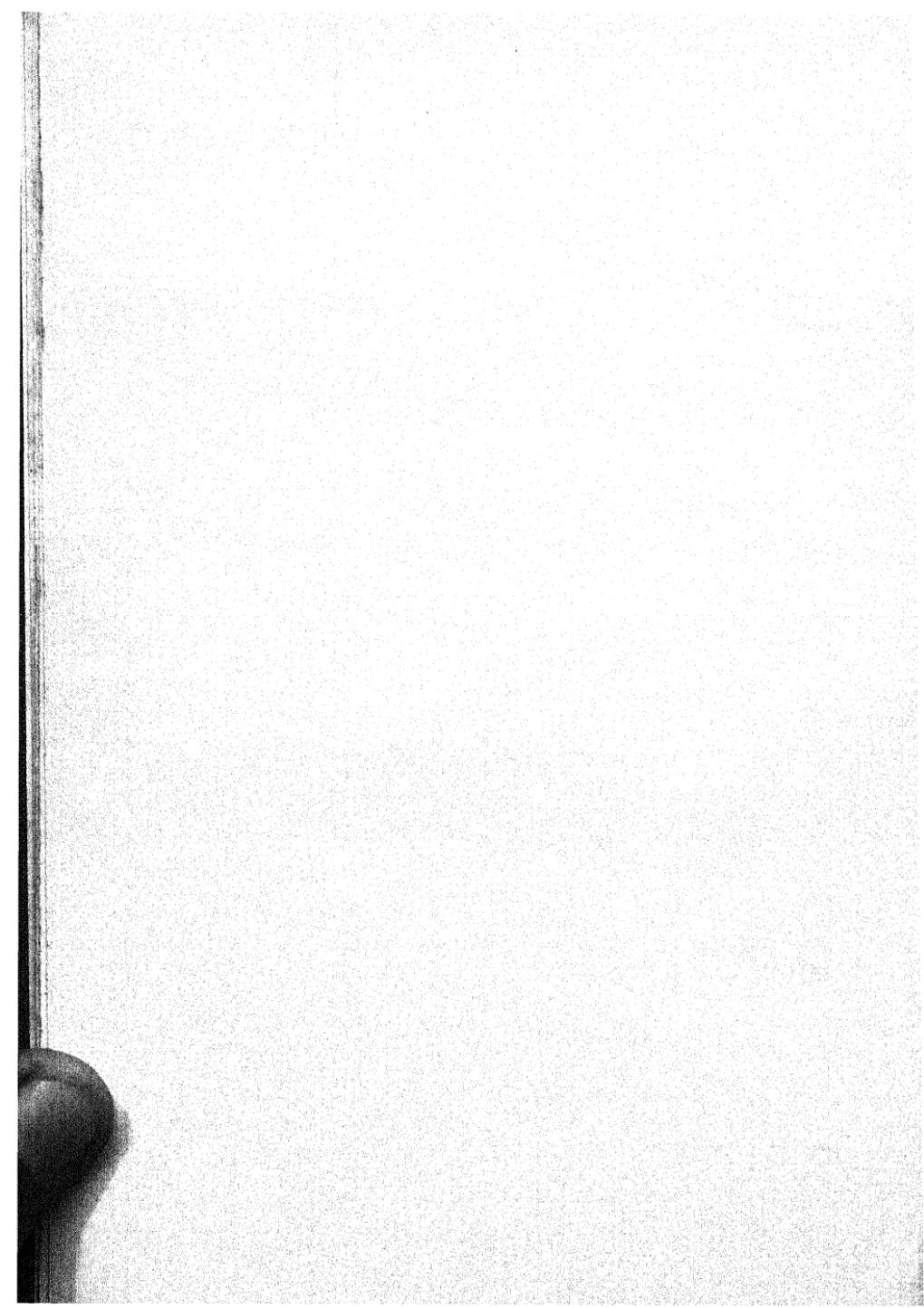
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## The Radical Nature of Jesus' Teaching

The words of Jesus have the rugged fiber of the cypress tree and the jagged edge of the crosscut saw. Nothing but an excessive familiarity with his words or an insulated ignorance can keep us from perceiving this rigorous element. His language is extreme—extravagant. Hyperbole, antithesis, and paradox mark his style. His figures of speech are crammed with energy. Explosive as hand grenades, they are tossed into the crowds that listen. A tremendous vigor, an exuberant vitality, surges through his words.

In Jesus' words a man with a log in his eye tries to pick a cinder out of his brother's eye. In his words a man who has been forgiven a debt of ten million dollars refuses to forgive a debt of twenty dollars. In the words of Jesus a giant hand hangs a millstone around the neck of one who exploits a little child, and hurls the sinner into the midst of the sea. If you visualize that scene, you can catch the truly

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extreme quality of his utterance. What giant hand would seize the millstone, hang it around the neck of the offender, and hurl both out into the midst of the ocean?

In the words of Jesus one asks for bread and is given a stone; he asks for a fish and is given a snake.

In the words of Jesus men strain out the little gnats and gulp down the camels.

Many interpreters of Jesus' words have spoken appreciatively of the humor in his teaching. They stop the rapid action of the parable or the pointed expression and are amused at the ludicrous contrasts which result. If instead of being seen as pictures of motion, rapidly rushing to a climax or a contrast, they are regarded as still pictures, they are ludicrous in the extreme.

Imagine, if you can, the man who has strained out the little gnats and has started to gulp down the camel, with the hump of the camel halfway down. Not even Hollywood has produced anything more bizarre or ludicrous. This—say the enthusiasts—is an evidence of Jesus' humor.

My great-grandmother-in-law had a book of Bible sayings illustrated for children. They were a worthy predecessor of the comic strips of the present day. The saying about the man with a log or beam in his eye criticizing his brother who has a cinder in his eye was dramatically pictured. A little

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man stands at one side of the picture with a twelve-foot-long, foot-square beam sticking in his eye. Beyond the other end of the beam stands his neighbor holding his hand to an eye that has, presumably, a cinder in it. The man with the enormous beam sticking in his eye is futilely pawing the air trying to get the cinder out of his neighbor's eye.

But the words of Jesus carry none of the humor of this static picture; this is made clear by their context. The saying about the gnat and the camel is in a cluster of bitter sayings directed against the religious leaders, the ordained ministers, of Jesus' day. The tone of all these remarks is one of rigorous indictment. The epithets which he hurls at these people are: "You hypocrites!" "You blind guides!" "You blind Pharisees!" "You brood of snakes!" "You serpents!" "You murderers!" There is no more humor in this than in the atomic bomb. Jesus uses these rigorous expressions to make his sayings powerful—not to make them funny.

Professor E. J. Goodspeed used to quote a saying of G. K. Chesterton's applied to this quality in the words of Jesus: "The words of Jesus," said Chesterton, "are *gigantesque*." This is the most appropriate of all adjectives for the sayings of Jesus. They are the sayings of a giant—freighted down with tremendous weight and loaded with explosive power.

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Thus it is that, in his words, a camel crawls through a needle's eye. A mountain gathers its limbs under it, summons up all its strength, and leaps into the sea. The corpses bury one another. The man who would save his life must lose it. The first is last, and the last first.

The saying that the last shall be first and the first last is typical of Jesus' teaching. To the reader of the Gospels to whom it sounds natural and expected the understanding of his teaching is not far distant. Jesus could not have said: "It may be that you are twelfth in line. Do not worry; if you strive to do the will of God, you may move up to be tenth in line, or perhaps even eighth!" For Jesus speaks in terms of the extremes, in terms of the ends of the scale: "The last shall be first, and the first last." This is radical language; these are gigantesque words.

But little men do not like big words. And the conservatism of the majority has tried various ingenious devices to dull the edge of Jesus' remarks, to soften the jagged edges, to make them more conventional.

The most popular of all these escapes is the appeal to Oriental rhetoric, or to the original Aramaic language. We are assured by a recent writer in this field that the Aramaic language contains the same word for camel and for a large rope—so that the passage about the camel and the needle's eye should

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read: "It is easier for a rope to get through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to get into the Kingdom of God." And the author gives us the comforting impression that some Palestinian ropes would go through a needle's eye.

We are assured that the figurative expressions used by Jesus caused confusion, and that a full understanding of Oriental rhetoric will remove the confusion. Thus, "Tell no one," we are assured, is an Aramaism which means, Go and tell everybody.

These explanations of the extravagant figures of speech which Jesus used are unconvincing. The very flatness and commonplace nature of the results is an adequate indictment of their accuracy.

Still other students of the Gospels have felt that the solution to the difficulties which they find in Jesus' sayings must lie in an increased historical knowledge. They look, therefore, for all sorts of material—archaeological or otherwise—which may remove these difficulties. None of these discoveries is more ludicrous than the discovery of the "Needle's Eye Gate" in the wall of Jerusalem. We are told that the saying about the camel and the needle's eye is to be understood with reference to this narrow gate in the city wall. A camel, we are told, could get through the gate only with the greatest difficulty. But if someone were to pull from in front and another to push from behind, a camel

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could perchance scrape through the Needle's Eye.

It is strange that Jesus' disciples did not know about the Needle's Eye Gate and immediately assumed from the words of Jesus that he was describing an impossibility. The Gospel says that

Jesus looked around and said to his disciples,

"How hard it will be for those who have money to enter the Kingdom of God!"

But the disciples were amazed at what he said. And Jesus said to them again,

"My children, how hard it is to enter the Kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to get through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to get into the Kingdom of God!"

They were perfectly astounded and said to him,

"Then who *can* be saved?"

Jesus looked at them and said,

"For men it is impossible, but not for God, for anything is possible for God."

(Mark 10:23-27, italics mine.)

Since the disciples and Jesus believed it impossible for a camel to get through a needle's eye, the Needle's Eye Gate interpreters evidently have access to information which was denied Jesus' followers in his lifetime in Palestine. Jesus' assertion that God could save even a rich man rests on his faith in God's omnipotence, not on his knowledge that there was a narrow gate in the city wall.

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None of these attempts to reduce the gigantesque element in Jesus' words is successful. This element is too consistent a part of the vast bulk of the sayings. While skill in creating hypotheses may do away with one difficult passage by appealing to archaeology, or may clear up another to the satisfaction of a neat and orderly mind by an appeal to mis-translation, the numbers that remain leave the same basic difficulty for the student of Jesus' words. How is one to explain the rigorous, the extreme, and the gigantesque?

The insight of the poet has often surpassed the erudition of the scholar. Some verses by Joseph Auslander<sup>1</sup> say more about the quality of Jesus' words and what has happened to them than many learned volumes:

There were words like dark wounds, words meeker  
Than mercy, words blacker and bleaker  
Than the garden, the wine in the beaker,  
The kiss like a livid scar;  
There were words like a sweat, like spikes driven  
Through the heart, like an evil forgiven,  
And the scream that streaked blood across Heaven  
From that mouth burnt with vinegar!

But today every phrase that can flicker  
With a firefly's wink finds its picker

<sup>1</sup> From "Word Makers," in *No Traveller Returns* (copyright, 1935, by Joseph Auslander; pub. by Harper & Bros.) pp. 226-29.

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In some little lyrical vicar  
Who struts about puffed, self-appointed,  
And chirps of a twig or a trouble  
That is eating him up like dry stubble,  
Or likens his love to a bubble  
And deems himself darkly anointed.

The attempts to remove the rigorous element from Jesus' language fail because this rigorousness is neither rhetoric nor ornament; it is not a veneer upon the surface of his message but the natural grain of the wood. It takes its nature from the content of his words. It was not designed to attract an audience, but to convey his message.

If the rigorous nature of Jesus' words cannot be explained away on technical grounds, then they must mean something that is radical in the true meaning of that word. The ethical or moral teaching of Jesus was not a conventional morality then, nor is it now. Jesus preached to a very moral people and a very religious people, yet he was not satisfied with their morality and faith. Conformity to a conventional pattern of behavior was not enough for him.

There were religious restrictions on the use of oaths in his day. Some of these restrictions were tied up with what might be called church morality. The believers were taught to respect the sanctity of the various parts of the temple. Oaths sworn by the

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more sacred elements were the more binding; and, above all, from ancient times they had been taught that they should not swear by the name of the Lord in vain. But Jesus claimed an honesty so absolute as to make oaths unnecessary:

Again, you have heard that the men of old were told, "You shall not swear falsely, but you must fulfil your oaths to the Lord." But I tell you not to swear at all, either by heaven, for it is God's throne, or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great king. You must not swear by your own head, for you cannot make one single hair white or black. But your way of speaking must be "Yes" or "No." Anything that goes beyond that comes from the evil one. (Matt. 5:33-37.)

The sexual morality of the Jewish people was in that ancient world, and indeed in any period, relatively high. If Jesus was opposed to adultery, so was the great mass of the people to whom he spoke. Yet Jesus was not satisfied. If adultery was against the religious conscience of the time, Jesus forbade lustful thinking:

You have heard that men were told "You shall not commit adultery." But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman with desire has already committed adultery with her in his heart. (Matt. 5:27-28.)

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Nor can Jesus be called conventional if the concept of ethics is broadened to include the structure of society and the struggle to obtain justice. Justice was not enough for him. If a man sues you in the law courts, he says, and takes from you your shirt, let him have your coat also. Nothing is said about the justice of the claim, and even if the claimant had a legal ground for suing for the shirt, what does justice have to do with the giving of the coat also? Again Jesus said that if one compels you to serve as a guide for one mile, you should voluntarily go with him for the second mile. This is not the language of justice. If a man smites you on one cheek, said Jesus, turn to him the other also. No law code in the history of any people would include this as part of the attempt to make law and justice synonymous.

This extravagance is rooted in the claim for complete devotion to the will of God. You are to seek first the Kingdom of God, says Jesus; everything else is secondary. The Kingdom is the pearl of great price, for which the pearl buyer sold all his other possessions. The Kingdom is the treasure hidden in the field, for which everything is given up that it might be obtained. If your right eye is between you and the Kingdom, tear it out and throw it away; if your right hand would keep you from the King-

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dom, cut it off. This extreme command of ultimate  
devotion to the will of God and to nothing else  
colors all Jesus' teaching.

Equally extravagant, however, is his proclamation  
of the benevolence of God. God's sun, he tells  
us, shines on the evil and the good, and his rain falls  
on both alike. God's benevolence is unlimited by  
race or religiousness, and this benevolence of God,  
without limitations, is the pattern and ultimately  
the motivation and the reward for all who strive to  
do his will. Thus the teaching of Jesus, extravagant  
in language, is extravagant in deed. Jesus' own ac-  
tions set no limits to the people whom God loves.  
He associated with tax collectors, nonreligious peo-  
ple, sinners in respect to the will of God as revealed  
in the Bible. Jesus did this against the prudential  
wisdom of the religious leaders of his race. An  
enemy alien was the hero of the parable of the good  
neighbor. The father of the prodigal son added a  
tenderness to the definition of God which it had  
not known before. Seven times a day was not  
enough for Jesus to forgive a man. Four hundred  
and ninety times a day was not enough, and he  
spoke for God.

Nowhere is the combination of rigor and be-  
nevolence clearer than in the climactic paragraph  
at the end of the fifth chapter of Matthew:

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You have heard that they were told, "You must love your neighbor and hate your enemy," But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for your persecutors, so that you may show yourselves true sons of your Father in heaven, for he makes his sun rise on bad and good alike, and makes the rain fall on the upright and the wrongdoers. For if you love only those who love you, what reward can you expect? Do not the very tax-collectors do that? And if you are polite to your brothers and no one else, what is there remarkable in that? Do not the very heathen do that? So you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is. (Matt. 5:43-48.)

Is this the gentle Jesus, meek and mild, of our modern Sunday-school room? Or the stiff formal figure of cathedral stained glass? Or the intellectual abstraction of the creeds? No, this is a man of fire —a man of a ruthless tenderness who said, "I have not come to bring peace but a sword," who stirred Palestine so deeply that he was executed as a threat to the state.

This Jesus was crucified—a fate that seldom befalls the conventional and the commonplace.

The major task that confronts the student of Jesus' teaching is the identification and understanding of what distinguishes him from the conventional and the commonplace. There are formal elements of his teaching which are unconventional in modern terms. These should be recognized clearly before

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one digs into the essential content of the teaching. These formal unconventionalities can be summarized in one sentence. The teaching of Jesus was unsystematic, incidental and occasional, concrete, narrative; it was preaching; and it contained audible silences.

The teaching of Jesus is unsystematic. But stranger than any of his paradoxes is this: he was a teacher, but he never delivered a lecture; he was a preacher, but he never preached a sermon. Someone approached Jesus and asked a question; the answer he gave is part of the material that we call "the teaching of Jesus." Or someone called attention to the buildings in the city, and Jesus' comment upon them is another item in what we call his "teaching." His teaching is not systematic in the sense that the teaching of a modern university professor, or a high-school teacher, is systematic. We have no record of Jesus' teaching arranged in logical subject divisions. What we do have is answer to questions, the telling of stories, and collections of epigrams and paradoxes.

So far was Jesus from being the systematic teacher of the modern schoolroom that it is not accurate even to compare him with the modern preacher—though he is much closer to the preacher than he is to the teacher. For, so far as our records go, Jesus never preached a sermon. It is now com-

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monly acknowledged that such collections of sayings as appear in chapters 5-7 of Matthew's Gospel—the so-called "Sermon on the Mount"—are the result of editorial work done by the writers of the Gospels. Jesus himself never preached a sermon as long as the shortest sermon preached from a pulpit last Sunday morning.

The work of arranging Jesus' sayings in large collections was work that was done by his followers. These large collections of sayings are in no sense records of what Jesus said on some single occasion. His method of teaching was to answer a question, to make a comment, or to tell a very short story. In all of this there is little that is directly parallel to either modern teaching or modern preaching.

Again, the teaching of Jesus is concrete and not abstract. It is solid rather than rhetorical. And it is full of images that are drawn from daily life. A rapid survey of the Gospels will produce a long list of these everyday illustrations. In the words of Jesus we find references to salt, a lamp and a bushel basket, a shirt, wild birds, wild flowers, grapes and thorns, figs and thistles, the foundations of a house, sick people and a doctor, patches, wineskins, children playing on the street corner, the farmer sowing a crop, weeds, mustard, yeast, buried money, a pearl, a fish net, the dogs eating under the table,

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a vineyard, the mint and dill growing in the garden, whitewashed tombs, a hen and her chicks, a fig tree in the spring, bridesmaids, sheep and goats, a robber in a strong man's house, the farmer and his crop, a cup of water, a mountain, a coin, a poor but devout widow, a coat left in the house, a bridegroom, fox holes, a plow, lambs and wolves, three loaves of bread, an egg and a scorpion, bigger and better barns, the crows, the rain clouds before the storm, a lost sheep, a lost coin, a prodigal son, a dishonest manager, a sick beggar, a servant waiting on table, an unjust judge, and vultures around a dead body.<sup>2</sup>

In the long tradition of Greek and Western philosophy one of the cardinal principles is that the beginning of wisdom is the inspection of terms or the definition of words. But there is in Jesus' teaching no definition of words—no system of abstractions built from definition to definition, from data to inference to conclusion.

In this respect preaching is closer to poetry than it is to philosophy. In structure, function, and nature of materials the sermon and the poem belong together. Thus what Sir Philip Sidney says of the poet can be said of Jesus without qualification: "He

<sup>2</sup> Matt. 5:13, 15, 40; 6:26, 28; 7:16, 24 ff.; 9:12, 16-17; 11:16; 13:4, 25, 31, 33, 44, 45, 47; 15:27; 20:1 ff.; 21:33 ff.; 23:23, 27, 37; 24:32; 25:1 ff., 31 ff.; Mark 3:27; 4:26 ff.; 9:41; 11:23; 12:15, 42; 13:16; Luke 5:34; 9:58, 62; 10:3; 11:5, 12; 12:16 ff., 24, 54 ff.; 15; 16:1 ff., 19 ff.; 17:7 ff.; 18:1 ff.; 17:37.

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does not begin with obscure definitions, which must blur the margin with interpretations, and load the memory with doubtfulness."<sup>3</sup>

Everything is solid, everything is concrete. His teaching is popular teaching rather than the language of the philosopher or the professor. This has been said in classic form by Professor A. N. Whitehead. In a few sentences he summarizes, more effectively than any New Testament scholar, this aspect of the nature of Jesus' teachings:

The reported sayings of Christ are not formalized thought. They are descriptions of direct insight. The ideas are in his mind as immediate pictures, and not as analyzed in terms of abstract concepts. He sees intuitively the relations between good men and bad men; his expressions are not cast into the form of an analysis of the goodness and badness of man. His sayings are actions and not adjustments of concepts. He speaks in the lowest abstractions that language is capable of, if it is to be language at all and not the fact itself.

In the Sermon on the Mount, and in the Parables, there is no reasoning about the facts. They are seen with immeasurable innocence. Christ represents rationalism derived from direct intuition and divorced from dialectics.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> "The Defense of Poesy."

<sup>4</sup> *Religion in the Making* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1926), pp. 56-57.

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Thus we miss in the teachings of Jesus all technical vocabulary and those abstract definitions or special uses of terms which are so characteristic of the schoolroom and of the modern pulpit. What we find instead is epigram and story. And the stories, or parables, of Jesus are his characteristic form of expression. It is hardly necessary today to say that the parable is a means by which one idea—one single doctrine—can be taught at a time. It is now a commonplace of the Sunday-school classroom that the parable is not an allegory to be interpreted in elaborate detail but an illustration of a single point presented in narrative form.

The quality of some of this narrative as narrative is often overlooked. It was a teacher of English literature and not a professor of Bible who pointed out to me many years ago the bare narrative quality of many of the finest parables. If you will take as an example the parable of the prodigal son and eliminate all descriptive adjectives or adverbs, all description of any kind, you will take almost nothing from the story. It is action itself in words. It is narrative stripped to the running gears, without adornment and without refinement.

In the following version of this parable all purely descriptive words or phrases are italicized:

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A man had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, "Father, give me my share of the property." So he divided his property between them. *Not many days* later, the younger son gathered up all he had, and went away to a *distant* country, and there he squandered his property by *fast* living. After he had spent it all, a *severe* famine arose in that country, and he began to be in want. And he went and hired himself out to a resident of the country, and he sent him into his fields to tend pigs. And he was ready to fill himself with the pods the pigs were eating, and no one would give him anything. When he came to himself he said, "How many hired men my father has, who have more than enough to eat, and here I am, dying of hunger! I will get up, and go to my father, and say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your eyes; I no longer deserve to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired men!'" And he got up and went to his father. But while he was still a *long* way off, his father saw him, and pitied him, and ran and fell on his neck, and kissed him. His son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your eyes; I no longer deserve to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired men!" But his father said to his slaves, "Make haste and get out the *best* robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet; and get the calf *we are fattening*, and kill it, and let us feast and celebrate, for my son here was dead, and he has come to life; he was lost, and he is found!" So they began to celebrate. But his elder son was in the field. When he came in and approached the house, he heard music and dancing, and

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he called one of the servants to him and asked him what it meant. He said to him, "Your brother has come, and your father has killed the calf *he has been fattening*, because he has gotten him back *alive and well*." But he was angry and would not go into the house. And his father came out and urged him. And he said to his father, "Here I have served you all these years, and have never disobeyed an order of yours, and you have never given me a kid, so that I could entertain my friends. But when your son here came, who has eaten up your property with women of the street, for him you killed the calf *you have been fattening*!" But he said to him, "My child, you have been with me all the time, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because your brother was dead, and has come to life, and was lost and is found!" (Luke 15:11-32.)

Of these words only the "alive and well" of verse 27 could be spared. The "severity" of the famine is needed to motivate the return home. The "long" way that the father runs to greet the boy is—like the "best" robe and the "fatted" calf—an important emphasis in the story. Even though the elder son keeps all the property that is left and does not redivide with his brother, the prodigal gets a rich welcome home.

This narrative quality of the parables can be illustrated again and again. The parables of the good Samaritan, the buried treasure, and the pearl of

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great price are examples of a conciseness that reaches extremes in such parables as that of the yeast: "The Kingdom of Heaven is like yeast, which a woman took and buried in a bushel of flour until it had all risen" (Matt. 13: 33). Two clauses tell the whole story.

The reader of the Gospels may recognize this quality of bare narration yet hesitate to credit it to Jesus. In early Christianity a period of oral transmission was followed by extensive editing. Could not the quality of the narratives be due to the earliest Christian storytellers and editors?

The evidence we have favors Jesus as the author of this rapid, concrete style. The period of word-of-mouth transmission was very brief. Jesus was crucified in A.D. 29 or 30, and there were written "gospels" within thirty or forty years. This brief period of time does not allow for generation to follow generation in the polishing and repolishing of the tradition. Even more convincing is the nature of the editors' work where it can be identified. Generally speaking, they glossed and explained and expanded and qualified the curt sayings of Jesus. Some editor feared that the parable of the soils was not clear; so he added a wordy, tedious, and pedestrian explanation. Jesus in one brief saying condemned divorce; an editor qualified this by adding the exception—except for the cause of adultery. Jesus re-

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fused the clamor for a miracle by saying that no sign would be given to an evil and adulterous generation except the sign of Jonah. He probably said this with reference to the great preacher of judgment—John the Baptist. But various followers of Jesus took up this saying, added to it, interpreted it, and took from it the quality of style which I have described as characteristic of Jesus.

The words of Jesus are closer to modern preaching than they are to modern teaching. This likeness lies not in their subject matter but in the general nature of the content. Jesus does not argue with people. He does not seek to persuade them by reason. He is a herald of the Kingdom of God. What he utters is a proclamation, and in this he is close to the basic function of the sermon in the modern church. He has a message to deliver. He has the will of God to proclaim. In vivid and concrete and rigorous language he proclaims it to the people whom he meets on the street corners in the villages, to the fishermen in their boats at the seashore, to the farmer at work in the fields. It is teaching that is very close to preaching. "After John was arrested, Jesus went into Galilee proclaiming the good news from God, saying, 'The time has come and the reign of God is near; repent, and believe this good news.' " (Mark 1:14-15.)

The teaching of Jesus—occasional in its utterance,

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sometimes even incidental, concrete and popular, vivid rather than exact—is not systematic. It would not be the complete expression of a system of theology or religious belief if we had everything that Jesus said. We are, in truth, far from that ideal situation. What we have are fragments of the total amount of his teaching, preserved by the interest of his followers. Many of his parables have perished; many of his epigrams are gone forever. But if we had every paradox, every startling saying, and every story that he ever told, we should still lack the complete exposition of a system of faith.

Jesus' teaching is unsystematic in the sense that the silences in that teaching have a significance which we dare not overlook.

There are subjects in religious belief which Jesus never discussed but which were a vital part of his own faith. The modern man who would understand the nature of Jesus' teaching must know enough of the nature of these silences to hear them as well as the spoken words. Where Jesus shared the faith of his people and could safely assume their agreement with him, he neither argued nor told stories nor prodded them with pointed sayings.

Such an area of agreement is the belief in one God. Another is the belief that this God is in some especial manner related to the children of Israel. Another is the belief that God's will can be seen in

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some way in the events of history. Every congregation to which he spoke, every individual with whom he talked, shared the belief that God had revealed his will to his own people in a record, a revelation, the books of Scripture.

All these beliefs, and others, Jesus shared with his people. There is no saying of his that attacks idolatry, or the worship of gods that are no gods. And the explanation lies in the fact that his audience agreed with him. A sharp contrast is provided by the apostle Paul, who has much to say about idolatry and the worship of gods who are in reality no gods. For Paul was speaking to people who were converts from polytheism, and so Paul has much to say about it. Jesus has nothing to say about this. Jesus' silence here is a characteristic silence; he does not speak where he can assume agreement.

The importance of these silences can be illustrated by pointing out that there is very little direct teaching of Jesus in regard to the faith which he certainly held in God as creator and God as the powerful sustainer of life. God's care for the birds and the wild flowers is emphasized. (Matt. 6:26-32.) There are occasional references to the early stories in Genesis and the comforting assurance that God's power is so great that he can save even a wealthy man, but beyond this these important articles of faith are seldom expressed.

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The importance of the silences is such that the student who would understand the nature of Jesus' teaching in anything approaching a comprehensive or systematic way must familiarize himself with the ideas and practices of contemporary Judaism. It is only from a study of the religion into which Jesus was born that the blank pages in the book of his teaching can be filled in.

If it is granted, as it usually is, that a knowledge of the Jewish religion in Jesus' lifetime is essential to an understanding of what he said, it should be clear that it is doubly essential for an understanding of what he did not say. The one who writes about the teaching of Jesus is faced here with a serious dilemma. If he takes time to outline the areas of resemblance and that which was held in common by Jesus and his contemporaries, he will have little time left to speak of Jesus himself and his own words.

The studies published in recent years which describe in accurate detail the background of Jesus' teaching are numerous enough for me to feel at ease in passing rapidly over these areas of agreement with a recognition of their existence. I do this the more readily because I am convinced that the emphasis of the last generation upon these parallels has obscured the fact that Jesus was an individual with an individual message of great originality and power.

## The Originality of Jesus

**I**t must be admitted that the whole course of study in the last fifty years has been against the ascription of originality to Jesus. In brief, this has been due to three factors. The first of these was the study and publication of nonbiblical Jewish literature from the period following the close of the Old Testament canon down through the period of Jesus' lifetime. It is only in the last two generations that this material has been easily accessible to students of the life and teaching of Jesus. The work of such scholars as Joseph Klausner, C. G. Montefiore, Robert Travers Herford, and R. H. Charles—to mention only a few of the many—has greatly increased our knowledge of the parallels to the sayings of Jesus.

The degrees to which this discovery of the parallelism tends to a negation of originality on the part of Jesus can be seen in the following quotation from Herford:

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Whatever he meant by it, Jesus from first to last preached the Kingdom of God. And whatever it was taken to mean by those who used the term, the concept of the Kingdom of God was wholly Jewish. . . . But the point at present is simply this, that in speaking of the Kingdom of God Jesus was using a purely Jewish term, and using it just as it had been used for centuries before his time. It has not been shown that he added any new feature to the meaning which it had for the common understanding of those who heard him.<sup>1</sup>

Klausner has a chapter on the Jewishness of Jesus, the theme of which is, "Jesus was a Jew and a Jew he remained till his last breath."<sup>2</sup> In this same book there is a chapter on the ethical teaching of Jesus which is lavishly supplied with parallels drawn from Jewish sources. The student who is interested in pursuing this subject will find further parallels in the commentary on the first three Gospels written by Montefiore.<sup>3</sup>

The reality of these parallels is not to be challenged. Anyone who talks about the originality of Jesus is not using the word "originality" in any sense of one-hundred-per-cent novelty. The studies of the

<sup>1</sup> *Talmud and Apocrypha* (London: Soncino Press, 1933), p. 276.

<sup>2</sup> *Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1925), p. 368.

<sup>3</sup> *The Synoptic Gospels* (2nd ed.; London: Macmillan & Co., 1927). See also H. L. Strack and Paul Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch* (Munich: O. Beck, 1922-28).

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last two generations have demonstrated that in much of his teaching Jesus was as thoroughly of his time as he was in it.

Therefore the originality of Jesus can be approached as one approaches the originality of great creators in other areas of human activity. Shakespeare's *Hamlet* rests ultimately on the Danish history of Saxo Grammaticus and borrowed devices from Thomas Kyd's play *The Spanish Tragedy*. The hero of the one is a northern barbarian; of the other, a helpless weakling. Hamlet is more than both, and the earlier works are read today only because they were used by Shakespeare. Likewise Charles Dickens had all sorts of raw material to draw upon for his *Pickwick Papers*. Some of his characters are easily recognized as having prototypes before his pen began to write. Who that has read *Pickwick* can forget Mr. Alfred Jingle?

Now it so happened that Mr. Pickwick and his three companions had resolved to make Rochester their first halting-place; and having intimated to their new-found acquaintance that they were journeying to the same city, they agreed to occupy the seat at the back of the coach, where they could all sit together.

"Heads, heads—take care of your heads!" cried the loquacious stranger, as they came out under the low archway, which in those days formed the entrance to the coach-yard. "Terrible place—dangerous work—

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other day—five children—mother—tall lady, eating sandwiches—forgot the arch—crash—knock—children look round—mother's head off—sandwich in her hand—no mouth to put it in—head of a family off—shocking, shocking! Looking at Whitehall, sir? fine place—little window—somebody else's head off there, eh, sir?—he didn't keep a sharp look-out enough either—eh, sir, eh?"

"I am ruminating," said Mr. Pickwick, "on the strange mutability of human affairs."

"Ah! I see—in at the palace door one day, out at the window the next. Philosopher, sir?"

"An observer of human nature, sir," said Mr. Pickwick.

"Ah, so am I. Most people are when they've little to do and less to get."

Yet he had an existence before Dickens' day. As the Strolling Player in Theodore Hook's *Friend of the Family* he speaks in the same disjointed fashion; but in *Pickwick* he is real, he is cynical, he is glibness syncopated. He is the down-at-heel yet urbane hero of an elopement that fizzled. He is, in short, Mr. Alfred Jingle, and we know of the existence of Hook's Strolling Player because we are drawn to *Pickwick Papers*. The Alfred Jingle of *Pickwick Papers* is original.

If one can say it without irreverence, Jesus is original in the same sense—not that he creates raw material, but that he uses it to build a new structure.

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When a Chicago apartment is wrecked, the old bricks are piled up and sold. They go into new buildings. They make up the side walls and the rear. New bricks are used only for the front. Some of the bricks Jesus used were worn smooth. They had no corners left. For example, "You must love the Lord your God with your whole heart, your whole soul, your whole mind, and your whole strength," and "your neighbor as yourself." But the mortar that he used to fasten that brick in place was the story of the good Samaritan, and in all religious experience since his day love of neighbor has had a new tone because of it.

The second factor that obscured the originality of Jesus was the study of the origin of the Gospels, of the gospel before the Gospels, by the method known as "form criticism," but more accurately called "social-historical method." This method led to an emphasis upon the creative role of the primitive Christian community in the formation, as well as in the transmission, of the gospel material. That the Christian community did play a creative role, especially in the period of oral transmission, is now generally admitted. The followers of Jesus omitted, modified, and added to the teachings of the Master. In the hands of such scholars as Rudolf Bultmann in Germany and some of the younger teachers in this country, the new method led to a complete histori-

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cal skepticism in regard to Jesus' life and teaching. The more moderate work of Martin Dibelius has gradually counteracted this extreme skepticism. It is not too much to say that his book *The Message of Jesus Christ* turned the tide. At the least, it is a landmark indicating the point at which the tide turned. But the date on the title page of the English translation is 1939, and the twenty years that preceded were dominated by the historical skeptic. If one cannot know what Jesus said, it is futile to discuss his originality. Thus the period between the wars saw little interest in this theme.

Neither the study of Jewish parallels nor form criticism as such is to blame for the inability of scholars to appreciate seriously the originality of Jesus. In the last analysis, the denial of the originality of Jesus is due to the skeptical strain of thought which characterizes much of the philosophy and the writing of history during the last one hundred years. Nietzsche's antihistoricism, the contempt for history by twentieth-century positivism, the philosophic skepticism of the "crisis" theologians, are only the more recent symptoms of this fundamental error.

Thus the third factor that blocked the ascription of originality or individuality to Jesus underlies the first two. It underlies also the vogue of standardless interpretation, scientific and sociological in rootage.

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The cult of objectivity in the humanities rested to some extent upon the great prestige of the natural sciences. The ambition of all branches of learning was to be "scientific." This became true even in the humanities and religion. In my student days we were taught "the scientific method of biblical interpretation." While the establishment of actual experiments was reluctantly admitted to be impossible, we could strive for complete objectivity. We could study manuscripts; we could make word counts in vocabularies; we used mathematics and statistics as much as we could.

Thus the psychologist abandoned the study of the individual as a person to try to establish statistics for social groups, or he turned to the physiology of the nervous system. Sociology became increasingly statistical and descriptive. Morals were the customs of a particular place and time. Literary works and religion also became aspects of a particular culture. This made it impossible to evaluate an individual or his work except on a limited relative scale. It did not encourage the appraisal of an ancient work in present-day terms or even across the generations. At its worst this fashion led to the debunking of all the allegedly great.

The habit, made fashionable in the last generation, of debunking all the great men of the past, of reducing them to the level of our own petty attain-

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ments, is a disease of anemic souls complicated by an infection of pragmatism that has no questions to ask except, "Did it work in its own day?" and no praise to give except to say, "He was a man with the standards of his own generation," or, "This worked in its own environment."

It is, however, possible to believe in the existence of great men, of geniuses, the significance of whose work transcends their own generation. It is not possible to "explain" Jesus as a psychopath, to "explain" Paul as an epileptic or a schizophrenic or a sexual pervert.

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Listen to Joseph Wood Krutch on similar explanations of Shakespeare. In a criticism of three interpretations of Shakespeare the dramatic critic makes the point that much of the research of the schools is frankly collateral to the central issue and far remote from it:

Suppose we propose a test of significance; suppose we say that no critical or explanatory remark about a writer or his works is valid unless it appear that the remark would not be equally true of any other writer or writings. Surely the test is not unreasonable, but how much would it leave of any of the currently popular "explanations" of a literary masterpiece, whether these "explanations" be psychological, on the one hand, or economic, on the other? Even assuming that all that is said in any one of them is true as far as it goes, how

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much light does it throw on the fundamental question, which is simply why the work under discussion is more or less valuable than others written by men who grew up under the same economic conditions or whose psychological pattern could be drawn in precisely the same terms? <sup>4</sup>

Mr. Krutch then applies this test to the three interpreters of Shakespeare. The first interpretation, by Sir Sidney Lee, is written in the line of old-fashioned historical scholarship, and it records the fact—hitherto unknown to scholarship—that Shakespeare's father was once fined by the village of Stratford for failing to remove a pile of manure from his dooryard. The second critic was Frank Harris, who explains the sonnets by assuming that they were addressed to a man whom the author loved in an abnormal fashion. Mr. Krutch's comments on these two incline to give precedence to Sir Sidney in that he claims less for his discovery than Mr. Harris claims for his. He says that "one may ask in all seriousness whether homosexuals are, by virtue of their homosexuality, any more likely to write like Shakespeare than are men whose fathers have been fined for failing to remove manure from their doorsteps."

The third critic was a contemporary Russian who maintains that Falstaff is to be understood as a

<sup>4</sup> "Beauty's Rose," *The Nation*, cxlv (1937), 132.

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type of decaying feudal knighthood. The basic limitation to all these explanations, whether psychological or sociological, is that they explain too much and too little. Any explanation of Shakespeare in terms of his environment must explain his contemporaries as well. "It may," to quote Mr. Krutch, "explain why he was an Elizabethan, but it does not explain why the other Elizabethans were not Shakespeare"; and that is, after all, as Mr. Krutch says, the important question. The dramatic critic goes on to suggest as the severest test of any work of Shakespearean criticism that when we have finished reading the explanation of Shakespeare we should immediately go on to read some lines of Shakespeare and then ask what the critic has contributed which will help the reader to perceive or account for or evaluate the lines he reads.

Two lines were enough for Mr. Krutch—enough, that is, to demonstrate to him that Shakespeare was a poet. But let us assume that we are not as well versed in literature or drama as the critic is and subject ourselves to a somewhat longer selection from the writings of the Bard of Avon. One sonnet and one lyric should be enough to suggest something of the pattern or structure of Shakespeare's abilities:

Let me not to the marriage of true minds  
Admit impediments. Love is not love

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Which alters when it alteration finds,  
Or bends with the remover to remove:  
O, no! it is an ever-fixed mark  
That looks on tempests and is never shaken;  
It is the star to every wandering bark,  
Whose worth's unknown, although his height  
be taken.  
Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and  
cheeks  
Within his bending sickle's compass come;  
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,  
But bears it out even to the edge of doom.  
If this be error and upon me proved,  
I never writ, nor no man ever loved.

(Sonnet 116.)

Sigh no more, ladies, sigh no more!  
Men were deceivers ever,  
One foot in sea and one on shore,  
To one thing constant never:  
Then sigh not so, but let them go,  
And be ye blithe and bonny,  
Converting all your sounds of woe  
Into Hey nonny, nonny!  
(*Much Ado About Nothing*, II, iii.)

These two poems are vivid contrasts that suggest a mastery which no samples can demonstrate. You cannot show the impressiveness of the building by carrying around a couple of bricks. Yet these two are enough to indicate the value of the test sug-

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gested by Mr. Krutch, "that no critical or explanatory remark about a writer or his works is valid unless it appear that the remark would not be equally true of any other writer or writings." Is such a test applicable to the assertion that the teaching of Jesus possesses an individuality of its own, that there is in it originality comparable to that of the great creative geniuses in all fields of human achievement?

In the past generation of historical study of Christian origins no scholar has shown greater ability in the employment of environmental study to illuminate early Christian history than has Shirley Jackson Case. His careful record of the career of Jesus used the so-called social-historical method as a means of obtaining the maximum of accuracy in the description of Jesus of Nazareth.<sup>5</sup> This method uses Nazareth to interpret Jesus of Nazareth, and insists on its being the Nazareth of Jesus' own lifetime.

It is not too much to say that where the environment supplies the criteria of authenticity the individual is portrayed in such fuzzy outline that he blends indistinguishably into his background. Thus Case's work illuminates every aspect of Jesus' career that was duplicated by his contemporaries, but it

<sup>5</sup> *Jesus: A New Biography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1927).

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dulls the things in which he was an individual. It shows us Jesus the Jew, but not Jesus.

This same scholar prefaced a later study with the following statement on the role of the individual:

In attempting to review the history of ancient Christianity by employing the biographical approach, one will do well to note that the makers of the Christian Movement lived and worked in close touch with their fellow-men. They shared their companions' experiences, thought their thoughts, participated in their activities, and personified their hopes. Biographical history, to be genuinely illuminating, must view conspicuous persons as facets, mirrors, types, of the age and society to which they belonged.

Outstanding historical individuals were, however, not simply passive channels through which the common life of the past flowed with concentrated power into the present. They were also creators, whose initiative, originality and aggressiveness gave momentum to the stream and kept society's expanding life from growing stagnant. They were the agitating spirits that troubled the face of the waters.

Mere mass humanity seems unable, of itself, to rise to the highest possibilities of existence; until capable leaders emerge progress lags. While effective leaders are always men of their own day, sharing abundantly in the life of their fellows, they exhibit also in some unusual degree ability to effect the release of fresh ideas or ideals, a power to concentrate upon some slumbering interest, a self-sacrificing readiness to serve

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some worthy cause, a new insight into life's values, a peculiar capacity for organizing hitherto incoherent yearnings, or an inspiring personal devotion to a timely enterprise. One or more of these characteristics makes them conspicuous. They are the creative individuals who, in religion as in any other sphere, keep mankind moving forward to the better things that are yet to be.<sup>6</sup>

It is my belief that Jesus had more than one of these qualities and that any interpretation or understanding of his teaching must attempt to identify these qualities.

Christian champions of Jesus' originality have often hindered its general recognition, for their claim that Jesus' teaching was new teaching has often been based on falsehood or trivialities. Nowhere is this more clearly seen than in what they say about the Golden Rule. They point superciliously to the negative form of the Golden Rule in Tobit 4:15, "What you hate, do to no man!" and to its parallel in the teaching of Hillel. They point with pride to the positive form of this rule in Matt. 7:12 (and Luke 6:31): "You must always treat other people as you would like to have them treat you." Yet it is quite probable that both forms of this saying were current in pre-Christian Judaism and early Christianity. The saying in Aristeas 207 approximates the

<sup>6</sup> *Makers of Christianity* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1934), I, xi-xii.

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positive rule; some ancient texts of Acts 15:28 read the negative form, as does the primitive Christian manual the Didache (1:2). Jesus may well have heard the Golden Rule expressed in positive form by his Jewish contemporaries in Palestine. Like some other sayings recorded in the Gospels, this might well be included in quotation marks as a well-known saying of the time.

A good example of these quoted sayings is the trilogy: "Ask, and it shall be given you. Seek, and you shall find. Knock, and it shall be opened to you. (Matt. 7:7-8, trans. mine.) It is not these words that contain a teaching of Jesus, but the words that follow, which are essentially a commentary or homily upon this proverbial text.

The case of the Golden Rule is similar. It is quoted by Jesus from the religious lore of his people. It is no more distinctively his than the prudential saying that one should count the cost before undertaking any large enterprise.

In its meaning the Golden Rule is not only not original with Jesus; it is not even congenial to the characteristic teaching of Jesus. "This Golden Rule with its philosophy of 'measure for measure' is quite out of harmony with the heroic sentiments of His sayings."<sup>7</sup> Jesus' teaching proclaims in extreme and

<sup>7</sup> Martin Dibelius, *The Sermon on the Mount* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1940), p. 53.

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radical form the nature of God and God's will for men. This will of God requires love for enemies—even for personal enemies—prayers for oppressors, and unasked service to the exploiter. And the motivation is the believer's relation to God: "These things," said Jesus, "you must do if you are to be the children of God." This love without frontier is a response to God. It gushes up like an oil well when the subterranean sea is touched. It is not centered within the individual. It is not a summation of acts discovered by a careful scrutiny of what the individual's own wishes or desires are. It is the response to God's will. It looks up and not in. It does not say: "Figure out what you like, and do this for other people!" It proclaims what God is like and challenges the hearer to an adequate response. "It is the will of my Father in heaven," said Jesus on one occasion, "that not a single one of these children be lost." It is this that motivates the disciple, that forbids the abandonment of children. It is not the careful consideration of my own concern for my own children that leads me to be concerned about other people's children. Not in the teaching of Jesus. "The Kingdom of Heaven"—the will of God—said Jesus, "is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found, and buried again. And he was overjoyed, and went and sold everything he had and bought the field." (Matt. 13:44, trans. mine.) This is not

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measure-for-measure morality, and in contrast to its quality the so-called Golden Rule is leaden indeed.

One might as well say that the glory of Christmas is the tinsel ornament on the Christmas tree as to say that Jesus was an original teacher because he rephrased the Golden Rule in positive form.

Even more fallacious is the frequent claim by Christian ministers that Jesus was original because he taught the fatherhood of God. It has been often and accurately said that, had we lost every saying of Jesus that refers to the fatherhood of God, we should know that he taught it because the concept was so common in the Jewish religion of his day.

But the claim that Jesus' teaching is new teaching can be sustained in various ways. The crucifixion on a Judean hill is enough in itself to demonstrate a minimum of individuality in Jesus. He was not so ordinary that he could not be observed by the vigilant eye of the Roman procurator.

The strength of his individuality is shown in the difficulty with which scholars and students of his life and teaching have struggled to classify him. No label fits him well. Books have been written to demonstrate that he was a Pharisee of the Pharisees. Equally learned and equally unconvincing books have been produced to show that he was an Essene. Still others have labored the thesis that he was one

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of the Zealots, a messianic revolutionary, a Son of David attempting by force of arms to restore the kingdom to Israel. The course of criticism has been such as to veto all these classifications, including such bizarre ones as would make him nothing more than an imitator of John the Baptist. There was enough originality or individuality in him that when the pattern of a class is put upon him he sticks out all around the edges.

The element in his words and his message already described as extravagant or "gigantesque" is admitted as original by the greatest of the Jewish scholars as well as by Christian interpreters. Joseph Klausner's justly famous book *Jesus of Nazareth* speaks of an exaggerated Judaism in Jesus' words. This exaggerated Judaism Klausner sees as

the ruin of national culture, the national state, and national life. Where there is no call for the enactment of laws, for justice, for national statecraft, where belief in God and the practice of an extreme and one-sided ethic is in itself enough—there we have the negation of national life and of the national state.<sup>8</sup>

Montefiore has an equally clear-cut admission of the individuality and originality of this extravagance. In his case it is recognized in Jesus' words

<sup>8</sup> P. 374.

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about the benevolence of God. The God who seeks the sinner, he says, is a new teaching.<sup>9</sup>

If there is an original element in the teaching of Jesus, it can be seen in the nature of the structure which Jesus built out of sayings old and new. The best clue to this structure is to be found in what he emphasized. The study of any one of several foci will serve to make this plain. One could study what Jesus said about integrity or the inwardness of religion, or about God's benevolence, or about humility, or about the primacy of the Kingdom. All these things he emphasized, and a study which went deeply into any one of them would be an adequate clue to the originality or individuality of Jesus' teaching.

<sup>9</sup> *Op. cit.*, I, cxviii.

## Humility in Jesus' Teaching

Jesus was like us in that he moved into a furnished house. Some of the furniture he built himself, but much was already there. Yet the arrangement of the room, could we visit him at home, would give us a clue to his own way of living. In that living room there was one chair called "humility." It was a chair that saw a lot of use. The springs in the seat were broken, and the covering on the arms was worn through. In the attempt to understand the nature of Jesus' teaching the student by concentrating upon this one topic of humility can find his way through the casualness, the incidentalness, and the partialness of Jesus' words to the interrelatedness of the whole. Jesus had much to say about humility.

To some who were confident of their own uprightness and thought nothing of others he used this illustration:

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Two men went up to the Temple to pray; one was a Pharisee and the other a tax-collector. The Pharisee stood up and uttered this prayer to himself: "O God, I thank you that I am not like other men, greedy, dishonest, or adulterous, like that tax-collector. I fast *two* days in the week; I pay tithes *on everything I get*." But the tax-collector stood at a distance and would not even raise his eyes to heaven, but struck his breast, and said, "O God, have mercy on a sinner like me!" I tell you, it was he who went back to his house with God's approval, and not the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the man who humbles himself will be exalted. (Luke 18:10-14, italics mine.)

This is a typical parable of Jesus. There is no description in it, nothing but straight narration. The characters have little more said about them than is said about Pat and Mike in the average story about two Irishmen. How old was the Pharisee? Was he short or tall? Jesus does not bother to tell us. The story has only one point. It is not that the Pharisee was standing, not that he prayed silently, but that one proud man and one humble man appeared before God and the humble man was justified.

It is not the nature of the grounds for pride that is attacked in the Pharisee. It is not legalism. It is simply religious pride. One of the Jewish interpreters of Jesus has said that Jesus could love everyone but a Pharisee. This is almost literally true. The

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Pharisee of this parable Jesus did not love. This Pharisee knew that he was good. He did more than was required of him by the law. Instead of fasting once a week he fasted twice a week; instead of tithing only those substances for which tithes were prescribed he gave tithes of everything that he possessed. He did much more than was required of him; he knew it and he was proud of it. Jesus attacks this pride.

Pride is the vice and humility is the virtue throughout much of Jesus' teaching. In the Beatitudes which open the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus awards God's blessing to the poor in spirit, to the mourners, to the meek, to the peacemakers. When he discusses religious observances, the point which he emphasizes is that people who go to church to be seen have received the only reward they will get, but that true worship is not ostentatious.

But take care not to do your good deeds in public for people to see, for, if you do, you will get no reward from your Father in heaven. So when you are going to give to charity, do not blow a trumpet before yourself, as the hypocrites do, in the synagogues and the streets, to make people praise them. I tell you, that is all the reward they will get! But when you give to charity, your own left hand must not know what your right hand is doing, so that your charity may be secret,

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and your Father who sees what is secret will reward you.

When you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites, for they like to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the squares, to let people see them. I tell you, that is the only reward they will get! But when you pray, go into your own room, and shut the door, and pray to your Father who is unseen, and your Father who sees what is secret will reward you. And when you pray, do not repeat empty phrases as the heathen do, for they imagine that their prayers will be heard if they use words enough. You must not be like them. For God, who is your Father, knows what you need before you ask him. . . .

When you fast, do not put on a gloomy look, like the hypocrites, for they neglect their personal appearance to let people see that they are fasting. I tell you, that is all the reward they will get. But when you fast, perfume your hair and wash your face, so that no one may see that you are fasting, except your Father who is unseen, and your Father who sees what is secret, will reward you.

(Matt. 6:1-8, 16-18.)

It was because of the importance of humility that Jesus rebuked the ambitions of his followers. When a discussion arose among Jesus' disciples as to which of them would be the greatest, Jesus knew the question that was in their minds, and he took a child and made him stand by his side and said to them: "Who-

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ever welcomes this child on my account is welcoming me, and whoever welcomes me, welcomes him who has sent me. For it is the lowliest among you all who is really great." (Luke 9:46-48.) .

Again, in the well-known story of Zebedee's sons' asking for positions of power the same severe emphasis upon humility is found.

And Zebedee's two sons, James and John, came up to him and said,

"Master, we want you to do for us whatever we ask."

He said to them,

"What do you want me to do for you?"

They said to him,

"Let us sit one at your right hand and one at your left hand, in your triumph."

Jesus said to them,

"You do not know what you are asking for. . . ."

When the other ten heard of this they were at first very indignant at James and John. And Jesus called them to him, and said to them,

"You know that those who are supposed to rule the heathen lord it over them, and their great men tyrannize over them; but it is not to be so among you. Whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to hold the first place among you must be everybody's slave. For the Son of Man himself has not come to be waited on, but to wait on other people, and to give his life to free many others."

(Mark 10:35a, 41-45.)

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It is doubted by many scholars that the last sentence in this saying belongs to the original utterance, but even if it does, it indicates a championing of humility in an authentic sense. The doubtfulness of this last sentence and its essentially secondary nature can be seen also in what the Fourth Gospel has made out of this same idea. In the Fourth Gospel Jesus is proud, powerful, and glorious. Through its pages Jesus walks as a self-conscious god aware of the fact of his divinity, but even in this Gospel the author is compelled by the force of the primitive tradition as to the humility of Jesus and his teaching to render at least lip service to humility:

Jesus, fully aware that the Father had put everything into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, rose from the table, took off his outer clothing, and fastened a towel about his waist. Then he poured water into the basin and began to wash the disciples' feet, wiping them with the towel that was about his waist. So he came to Simon Peter. He said to him,

"Master, are you going to wash my feet?"

Jesus answered,

"You cannot understand now what I am doing but you will learn by and by."

Peter said to him,

"I will never let you wash my feet!"

Jesus answered,

"You will have no share with me unless I wash you."

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Simon Peter said to him,  
"Master, wash not only my feet but my hands and  
my face too!" . . .

When he had washed their feet and put on his clothes and taken his place, he said to them again, .

"Do you understand what I have been doing to you? You call me Teacher and Master, and you are right, for that is what I am. If I then, your Master and Teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another's feet too. For I have set you an example, in order that you may do what I have done to you. I tell you, no slave is superior to his master, and no messenger is greater than the man who sends him. Now that you have this knowledge, you will be blessed if you act upon it."

(John 13:3-9, 12-17.)

John is very careful to avoid any imputation of real humility to Jesus in this story. Jesus washes his disciples' feet as an example to them of what they should do, not because they are tired and he feels sorry for them. He deliberately steps out of character for a moment and puts on this demonstration for the benefit of his disciples. When he is through, he carefully calls their attention to his condescension. The meaning of the story for the fourth evangelist is not that Jesus was humble—not the Jesus who said, "You call me Teacher and Master, and you are right, for that is what I am." But the amazing thing is that the author of this Gospel should have

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included even this carefully protected record of a humble Jesus. The only explanation of the presence of the story of the footwashing in the Fourth Gospel is the presence in all forms of early Christian tradition of the knowledge that Jesus taught humility and was humble.

It is unfortunate for the understanding of Jesus in modern times that the interpreters have followed in the path of the Fourth Gospel rather than the first three. In these first three Gospels, Jesus associates with people of all classes. He eats with tax collectors and sinners. He does not rebuke the prostitute who washes his feet as he lies at table. He even eats lunch with a Pharisee. And in all these records there is no indication of condescension on his part. The student of the first three Gospels gets a clear impression of a man who stands solidly upon the common ground of all humanity, who does not climb down steps to reach the poor, who never condescends to sinners or pats them on the head with a patronizing hand. The Jesus that our earliest sources reveal to us is one who deserves the title which was thrown at him as a term of reproach as the church achieved respectability: "Friend of Sinners."

In no other area is there a stronger contrast between Jesus and his followers of the present day than in this area of a humility that permits man to

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look his fellow man levelly in the eye. I remember vividly a scene from a popular Hollywood interpretation of the good and successful and praiseworthy minister of religion. As he sits at his desk in his study one evening, a prostitute comes in and, falling on her knees beside him, pours out her regret at the kind of life she has come to live. The young Hollywood hero, immaculate and ascetic-looking, pats her gently on the top of the head and encourages her to believe in divine forgiveness.

The Gospels tell us that one day a man came to Jesus and asked, "Good master, what must I do to make sure of eternal life?" and that Jesus' initial statement to him was the repudiation of the title "good." "Why do you call me good?" he said. "No one is good but God himself." (Mark 10:17-18; Luke 18:18-19.)

A similar insistence on oneness with the people is found in his habit of eating with "sinners." The careful religious leader in Jesus' day did not accept invitations to dine out with the ordinary people. The will of God as revealed in Scripture set certain prescriptions upon the preparation of food. But the poverty-stricken were seldom able to meet all these requirements or careful enough about them to observe them. Many a Pharisee, therefore, or scribe, refused to dine out with these people, lest he involuntarily break the law and disobey God.

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Jesus accepted invitations to eat with these people. He was evidently confident that the values lay upon the side of communion rather than on the side of strict prescription and observation of a religious superiority. One of the greatest rabbis said: "No one of the common people is pious." What he meant is that the people of the land, as they were called, could not or would not go to the full length of keeping all the laws, and this was the same great rabbi whose statement upon the first and great commandment closely parallels Jesus' own teaching.

The humility of Jesus is reflected even in the legendary parts of the gospel story. No scholar doubts that the story of the temptation as it appears in Luke 4:1-13 and the parallel in Matthew is a legend. But the accuracy of the message is borne out by saying after saying and incident after incident from more dependable parts of the gospel. What the legends of the temptation say in effect is that Jesus decided that God was not to be manifested in power, in miracle, and in glory. This is a reverse way of saying that, if the career of Jesus was a revelation of God, it was a revelation of humility, a revelation that did not emphasize power, either earthly or supernatural. There is in it nothing of the crown prince surrounded with the might of royal guards. Twelve legions of angels he will not call to wreak his will upon man.

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One of the strongest evidences of this quality in Jesus is the cluster of sayings about a "sign." This saying in its various forms is in response to the request that Jesus demonstrate to people who became interested in him that he was one of God's messengers—that he validate his message by the performance of a miracle, by summoning to his aid supernatural power which would force the people to admit that he spoke for God. In one form of this tradition we read the following:

The Pharisees came out and began a discussion with him, testing him by asking him to show them a sign from heaven. And he sighed deeply and said,

"Why do the men of this day ask for a sign? I tell you, no sign will be given them."

And he left them and got into the boat again and crossed to the other side."

(Mark 8:11-13.)

Again, in the Gospel of Matthew we find essentially the same story:

The Pharisees and the Sadducees came up and to test him asked him to show them a sign from heaven. He answered,

"It is a wicked and faithless age that insists on a sign, and no sign will be given it but the sign of Jonah."

And he left them and went away.

(Matt. 16:1-4.)

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In the Gospel of Luke the same story has received a further explanation. After the statement that no sign will be given to the wicked age except the sign of Jonah, Jesus goes on to say:

For just as Jonah became a sign to the people of Nineveh, so the Son of Man will be a sign to this age.... Men of Nineveh will rise with this generation at the Judgment and will condemn it, for they repented at Jonah's preaching, and there is more than Jonah here."

(Luke 11:30, 32.)

Luke thus identifies the sign of Jonah as the presence of a preacher of impending doom.

After the resurrection the disciples found the reference to the sign of Jonah as a reference to the crucifixion, burial, and resurrection of Jesus; for "as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth," says Matthew. (Matt. 12:40 A.S.V.)

It would be a hardy interpreter of the Gospels indeed who believed that this last form of the saying repudiating the sign was the original form rather than the brief repudiation recorded by Mark. He would not give them a sign. They pleaded with him to convince them. "Force us to believe!" they cried. But he would not.

There are other evidences that Jesus did not re-

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gard himself as vested with power and glory either royal or supernatural. It is hard to find, for example, any significance for the parables of the mustard seed and the yeast except in Jesus' awareness of the insignificance of the work that he was carrying on. The attempts to explain these parables as parables of growth adaptable to a belief in the evolutionary development of the Kingdom over long aeons of time will not bear close inspection. A modern analogue is the proverb "Tall oaks from little acorns grow." Any inspection of the parables themselves will show that they—like the proverb—contrast beginning and end rather than emphasize the process in between.

"How can we find any comparison," he said, "for the reign of God, or what figure can we use to describe it? It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown in the ground, though it is the smallest of all the seeds in the world, yet once sown, comes up and grows to be the largest of all the plants, and produces branches so large that the wild birds can roost under the shelter of it."

(Mark 4:30-32.)

Another figure which he used in speaking to them was this:

"The Kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard seed which a man took and sowed in his field. It is the

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smallest of all seeds, but when it is grown it is the largest of plants and grows into a tree, so that the wild birds come and roost in its branches."

Another figure which he used with them was this:

"The Kingdom of Heaven is like yeast, which a woman took and buried in a bushel of flour until it had all risen."

(Matt. 13:31-33.)

The whole point of these stories is the sharp contrast between insignificant beginning and glorious consummation. The emphasis of these stories is not at all upon the process of growth or development that lies in between, and no one who lived in the field or planted crops would think of the development of the mustard seed or the interval between seedtime and harvest as suggesting aeons of development. The experience of the farmer is that, once the seed is in the ground, the crops come up so fast that they are crowding at his heels crying out for harvest before the last crop is put in. It was not one like Jesus, acquainted with agricultural life, who first imagined that these figures of speech suggested the aeons of the evolutionary process. Their straight and simple meaning is that the work Jesus was doing was insignificant. It did not look like the Kingdom. It was not adorned with "the power and the glory." But it was the Kingdom all the same. The

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stories are a frank recognition of the humble nature of Jesus' work.

Another evidence of Jesus' humility is to be seen in the story of the excited tribute of the women of Jerusalem. One of these was so impressed with Jesus that she cried out, "Blessed is the mother who bore you and nursed you!" Jesus' reply was typical: "Blessed are they who hear God's word and do it!" (Luke 11:27, 28; trans. mine.) Saying after saying in the record has the consistency of agreement with this.

What man among you, if he has a servant ploughing or keeping sheep, will say to him when he comes in from the field, "Come at once and sit down at the table," instead of saying to him, "Get my supper ready, and dress yourself, and wait on me while I eat and drink, and you can eat and drink afterward"? Is he grateful to the slave for doing what he has been ordered to do? So you also, when you do all you have been ordered to do, must say, "We are good-for-nothing slaves! We have done only what we ought to have done!"

(Luke 17:7-10.)

This story is aimed directly at the righteous self-confidence of the doers of good who are sure that their goodness has achieved credit for them with God.

It is not, I believe, too farfetched to say that it is

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with reference to this parable that the rigorous statement on sinners which comes also from Luke's Gospel should be understood: "There will be more joy in heaven over one sinful person who repents, than over ninety-nine upright people who do not need any repentance." (Luke 15:7.) This was said with reference to people who knew that they did not need any repentance and were proud of the fact. Jesus found it easier to associate with sinners than with these people. He said to them in effect: "The prostitutes and the tax collectors go into the Kingdom of God ahead of you."

It is astonishing to note how much of the invective against the scribes and Pharisees in the twenty-third chapter of Matthew is directed to the single point of their pride:

They do everything they do to have men see it. They wear wide Scripture texts as charms, and they wear large tassels, and they like the best places at dinners and the front seats in the synagogues, and to be saluted with respect in public places, and to have men call them "Doctor."<sup>1</sup> But you must not let people call you "Doctor,"<sup>1</sup> for you have only one teacher, and you are all brothers. And you must not call anyone on earth your father, for you have only one father, your heavenly Father. And you must not let men call

<sup>1</sup> I have translated this word which Dr. Goodspeed transliterates—"Rabbi."

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you master, for you have only one master, the Christ. But he who is greatest among you must be your servant. Whoever exalts himself will be humbled and whoever humbles himself will be exalted."

(Matt. 23:5-12.)

Jesus was opposed to religious pride of this sort for two reasons. It comes as a barrier between man and God and between man and his fellow men. The whole point of the indictment of the Pharisee praying in the temple is that his pride set him off from the sinful publican. Complacency is divisive in human relations. It is the white man's arrogant conceit in the paleness of his skin, the churchgoer's confidence in his conventional goodness, which breaks mankind into groups that cannot co-operate.

A brilliant young Episcopalian clergyman discussed with me the proposals for Presbyterian and Episcopalian unity. "I can see," he said, "why the Presbyterians would be in favor of such a union. For we have much which they lack. But I cannot see how the Episcopalians would gain anything." It is pride that divides man from man and makes it hard for him to attain that degree of unity which he must attain if he is to work effectively for humane purposes and the achievement of desirable goals in society. We should realize that for this reason Jesus loved to attack people like us—the teachers, the lawyers, the learned, the well-to-do,

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the professional religious leaders. The whitened sepulchre, the dirty cup, the blind leader of the blind, became epithets for Pharisees because they liked to be called teacher or doctor, because they sat in Moses' seat and liked it, because they thanked God that they were not like other men, because their religious observances were done to be seen of men. Jesus believed that if one were completely lost in devotion to God and service to God's will he would not be capable of pride.

A contemporary poet has seen all the deadliness of complacency and expressed in it a poem called "Lullaby":

Fear not waves nor winds that bring  
The unbridled hurricane;  
Fear not cold nor the sleet's sting,  
Flaming heat nor levelling rain;  
Fear not even fear itself,  
Fear not pain.

Only fear the eye grown dull,  
Only fear the heart grown bland,  
That applauds the beautiful  
With a condescending hand,  
Only fear the green fields covered  
By the sand.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> By Elizabeth Coatsworth in *Country Poems* (copyright 1931, 1933, 1934, 1935, 1936, 1938, 1942 by Elizabeth Coatsworth Beston). By permission of the publisher, The Macmillan Co.

## The Source and Meaning of Jesus' Humility

The source of humility in Jesus himself and in his teaching lies in the individual's response to God. It is not unreal to say that Jesus' own response to God was a devotion so complete that he did not have time to worry about making clear to men what Jesus' role was, or what Jesus' title should be, or just what Jesus thought about himself. The supreme tribute to Jesus' own humility is that no one can answer the question, "What did Jesus think of himself?"

We can tell what he thought about John the Baptist.

What was it that you went out into the desert to look at? A reed swaying in the wind? Then what did you go out there to see? A man luxuriously dressed? Men who dress in that way you find in the palaces of kings. Then why did you go out there? Was it to see a prophet? Yes, I tell you, and far more than a prophet! This is the man of whom the Scripture says,

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"Here I send my messenger on before you;  
He will prepare the road ahead of you."

I tell you, among men born of women no one greater than John the Baptist has ever appeared.

(Matt. 11:7-11.)

This is what Jesus thought of John the Baptist, and it can be paralleled and amplified by other passages; but there is no such clear-cut statement of what Jesus thought about Jesus. I was reading one day to a friend the passage in the Fourth Gospel where the Jews in perplexity say to Jesus, "Tell us plainly who you are." And my friend's comment upon this was: "I have often sympathized with the Jews. Why didn't Jesus tell them plainly who he was?"

This is impressive as a response to the Jesus of the Fourth Gospel, for the author of that Gospel tried to read "the power and the glory" into the earthly career of the Nazarene. If he leaves his readers still perplexed as to the identity of Jesus, how much more uncertain were the people who met him in Capernaum or on the shores of Galilee!

Jesus never did plainly say who he was. He did not because he was not really much concerned with this question, for he had given his concern to God and God's will and reign and its significance for men. "Why do you call me good?" he asked. "No one is good, but God himself."

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The supreme tribute to the humility of Jesus is the fact that we cannot tell what he conceived himself to be. Anyone who has read the books in this field is aware of the wide diversity of opinion among competent scholars. Distinguished scholars are sure that Jesus claimed to be the Messiah. Equally distinguished and competent scholars deny that Jesus claimed to be the Messiah. Learned men assert that he identified himself with the suffering servant of Isaiah. Equally learned men repudiate this claim. It is not enough to say, as Professor C. T. Craig has said, that the form of religious faith held by the scholar is contributory to the decision he makes as to whether or not Jesus believed himself to be the Messiah.<sup>1</sup> Once this point is granted to the high degree and with the warm appreciation with which it was recently welcomed, then the possibility of any objective knowledge as to what Jesus said and meant must be abandoned. The diversity of opinion as to what Jesus thought of himself is more strongly rooted in the inadequacy, the insufficiency, of the evidence than in the particular presuppositions of the scholars. The scholars who have struggled with this question have attained a high degree of objectivity. They do not deserve patronizing sneers. They have struggled faithfully and intelligently

<sup>1</sup> "What Jesus Thought About Himself," *The Watchman Examiner*, Aug. 9, 1945, pp. 772 ff.

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with a problem that defies solution. There is not enough record of sayings of Jesus about Jesus to make it possible for independent studies to arrive at the same conclusion.

There is only one inescapable conclusion. This is that Jesus was not concerned to make people know what he was, and the reason is that he was almost completely dominated by the desire to make known to people what the will of God was and what God wanted done. This does tell us something about what Jesus thought of himself. It tells us clearly that he thought less of himself than he thought of God. This is the basis for his humility. He thought much of God.

Even if it is granted that humility would be valuable in solving social problems of the present day and that Jesus himself was humble, why should one turn to the Christian religion? There are other sources of humility.

There is a humility which is born in devotion to a cause. Such national crises as those through which we have just come abound in records of humble and complete devotion to the national cause. Sometimes this devotion found its particular reference to the soldier's comrades. The ballad of Rodger Young won its vogue in the war years through its narrative of one who "fought and died for the men he marched among" by making of himself a diversion-

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ary target so that the other men of his company might escape.

There is a humility which is born in the frank recognition of the limits of one's own abilities. The Stoic philosopher Epictetus rebuked a bright young student who came to him to study philosophy. When the student had admitted that his goal was to understand and control his desires and aversions and to set his desires upon what lay within his own power, Epictetus challenged him with the question, "Why then do you walk around as if you had swallowed an obelisk?"

"Because," replied the young man, "I desire to be admired as a philosopher and to have crowds of people who follow me say: 'What a great philosopher!'"

Epictetus had little difficulty in showing this young man that this desire was beyond his own power to fulfill and should be abandoned for a more fitting humility because of his limitations.

This type of humility often arises in admiration for those whose competence surpasses our own. Since I was born with a physique that would drive a football coach to despair, I have often felt this sense of humility in watching the heroes of the gridiron. I vividly remember sitting one afternoon in the stands at Stagg Field while one man alone played a strong enemy team to a standstill. He made every

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other tackle on defense. He carried the ball three out of four times on offense. He did all the kicking and passing for his team, and then in the third quarter he carried the ball through the opposing team eighty-five yards for a touchdown. The spontaneous roar of applause from those thousands of spectators was in a sense a recognition of excellence surpassing anything any of them could hope to achieve.

There are people who have been humbled in this same degree from meeting individuals whose character was so clear, possessed of such a high degree of integrity, that it transcended what had previously seemed possible. When I was a young graduate student at the University of Chicago, a friend took me out to visit Jane Addams of Hull House. We spent about twenty minutes listening to her talk about the house and its work. That was many years ago, and she is dead and gone, but the quality of her character is still a present exhortation to humility.

But if these two sources of humility were enough to produce the humility which society needs, the accomplishments of the full professor in the university would keep the associate professor humble; the elder would be enough to keep the deacon humble; the priest would always be humble because of the superior competence of the bishop; the fresh-

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man would always be humble because of the sophomore.

Unfortunately these steps go down as well as up. The associate professor swells with pride as he looks at the assistant professor, and the deacon can always look down at the plain, ordinary layman. Students at a men's college speak patronizingly of students in a women's college. The instructor has the graduate student, the graduate has the senior, the senior has the junior, the junior has the sophomore, and the sophomore has the freshman. The freshman has his family, his family has neighbors who don't have a child in college, and the neighbors have neighbors who don't have neighbors who have a child in college, and so on ad infinitum.

The common ascription of humility to scientist and scholar, for example, is based on the fact that the scientist knows what he does not know. But it is equally true and often more true that he also knows what he does know; and he knows many, many people who know less!

Humility is sometimes ascribed to ministers because it is part of their job. But the very work of the minister tends to create in him a professional arrogance. Several times a week he is engaged in public ceremonies of a very impressive character, and the spotlight is focused upon him. Like the college president, he is called upon to make pronounce-

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ments upon any and all questions. He is often surrounded by impressionable women who mistake their response to his physical charm for the work of the Holy Spirit. In these circumstances it is not strange that ministers lose the humility with which they first responded to their call to preach.

Today the ministry manifests a growing concern for the establishment of "professional ethics." In this it is looking enviously at the profession of medicine, in which professional ethics bolsters up the prestige of the profession and guarantees the practitioner that he will always be saluted with the honorific "Doctor."

Anyone who has been dean of a divinity school will testify that at all alumni meetings the first question is, "Why don't you give us a doctor's degree?" The alumni point with groans to the seven-year curriculum and with disdain to the lowly bachelor's degree they were given. They want to be called "doctor" even though the Scriptures they reverence forbid it. Their congregations support and sometimes create the desire, for the local church feels ashamed of its status if it alone in the community has a minister who is not a doctor. H. L. Mencken was aware of this when in the discussion of honorifics in his *American Language* he said that any Southern Baptist church was authorized by canon law to be-

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stow the degree of doctor of divinity upon its pastor.

If the ministry itself loses the humility which is necessary for effective participation in the struggle for our common good, how shall the laymen find it? They will not find it easily.

The distinctive source of this humility is God, but not God as power—not the Creator visible in the major and impressive elements of nature, in the sudden flame and shocking crash of lightning striking near by, in the vast expanse of sky above the surging ocean, the endless hordes of sea birds flying to some island at sunset in the tropics, or the moonlight lying upon a river of fog above the Susquehanna as it winds among the mountains of Pennsylvania. The humility that is born in the recognition of God's power is often a craven and abject thing. This is not the humility one finds in Jesus.

Its source is not God as the Absolute, the Unmoved Mover, the Ultimate Cause, the Entirely Other, the Supernatural Being outside this world. It is not God the omniscient, omnipotent, omni-everything of the later creeds of the church. This God is often found in the great achievements of the later liturgies, in the aspirations of Byzantine or Russian music singing "Lord, have mercy on us" in words and sounds that carry the believer to his face before the vast awful mystery of the Divine.

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This type of humility is often passive and content with adoration. But this is not the humility of Jesus.

Its source is not God as the Righteous, the Moral, the Holy One. The humility founded on devotion to this God is often pessimistic. It is best evidenced in the preachings of the Hebrew prophets and in such contemporary theologians as Reinhold Niebuhr. These people have a simple equation. God is just. Human beings are wicked. The two can meet only in judgment. Man cannot do the will of God. There is always a negative charge against him. There is often a dank cellar odor to this humility that is not found in Jesus.

The God who is the source of Jesus' humility is a God of grace. The extravagant benevolence of God—our reception of gifts that we do not earn—is the ground of the feeling of humility. "In this God commends his love to us, that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us." (Trans. mine.) This was said by Paul a generation after Jesus' day. But it is true to Jesus' own response to the goodness of God. He assures the people round about him that the very hairs of their heads are numbered, that not the cheapest little bird in the air can fall to the ground without God's lovingkindness taking note.

One of the Pharisees asked him to have dinner with him, and he went to the Pharisee's house and took his

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place at the table. Now there was a woman in the town who was leading a sinful life, and when she learned that he was having dinner at the Pharisee's house, she got an alabaster flask of perfume, and came and stood behind him at his feet, weeping, and began to wet his feet with her tears, and she wiped them with her hair, and kissed them, and put the perfume on them. When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself,

“If this man were really a prophet, he would know who and what the woman is who is touching him, for she leads a wicked life.”

Jesus answered him, and said to him,

“Simon, there is something I want to say to you.”

He said,

“Proceed, Master.”

“Two men were in debt to a money-lender: One owed him a hundred dollars and the other ten. As they could not pay him, he canceled what they owed him. Now which of them will be more attached to him?”

Simon answered,

“The one, I suppose, for whom he canceled most.”

“You are right,” he said. And turning to the woman he said to Simon,

“Do you see this woman? I came to your house; you did not give me any water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with tears and wiped them with her hair. You did not give me a kiss, but from the moment I came in she has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not put any oil upon my head, but she has put perfume upon my feet. Therefore, I tell you, her sins, many as they are, are forgiven, for she has loved me so much.

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But the man with little to be forgiven loves me but little."

And he said to her,  
"Your sins are forgiven!"

The men at table with him began to say to themselves,

"Who is this man, who even forgives sins?"

But he said to the woman,  
"It is your faith that has saved you. Go in peace."  
(Luke 7:36-50.)

Who is most attached to God? The one who is aware of the degree of his indebtedness to him. Jesus argued from human experience of generosity to the greater generosity of God:

Which of you fathers, if his son asks him for a fish will give his a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? So if you, bad as you are, know enough to give your children what is good, how much more surely will your Father in heaven give the holy Spirit to those who ask him for it!

(Luke 11:11-13.)

But it must be insisted that the God of grace whom Jesus reverenced was no weakling. He was neither an absentee landlord nor a sleeping partner. He had power to affect human history; he was affecting it; he would affect it still more in the future. This power was more than judgment; it was creation never ended. In spite of the rigor of

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the doctrine and the exaltation of the ideal, the Kingdom of God is good news. Part of the grace of God is that God is in charge of the program of salvation, God is doing it. The work that Jesus was doing was God's work, and it was buttressed by the larger work of God in history. This power is to be distinguished from that power of Caesar which the church too eagerly ascribes to God; but it is a real power, an active power inside history, judging and building for man's good because God cares.

The emphasis on grace-and-nothing-else, so common in some forms of idealism and religious sentiment, is supported by the weakness of the father in the modern American family. Our commonest title for God is "Our Father." But Caspar Milquetoast does not suggest the strength of God. The fathers in Jesus' parables are in charge of things. They are not henpecked. They make decisions and they shape events. It is because our Father in heaven will give us the Holy Spirit beyond our deserts that we are humbled before him.

It is not only the riches of the *Christian* heritage that should bring us to an attitude of humility before God, but all the unearned increments from school, from church, from the work of scientists the world around, from Greek and German poets, from French and Italian teachers, from British and Rus-

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sian champions of freedom, from all the good will of the common people that builds communities and undergirds all our social benevolences.

Christian humility born in the recognition of divine grace becomes the instrument of its further expression.

It is hard to discuss humility that is born of response to grace or benevolence without using bromides or indulging in sentimentality. Humility is expressed in classic form and with great restraint in the parable of the prodigal son. The clearest modern analogy is the humility of the very young lover when he learns that this goddess, this paragon of human kind, actually loves *him!* It is this undeserved gift that silences his tongue and takes his voice away.

This nature of Jesus' humility is recognized by Alfred North Whitehead in the following passage:

There is, however, in the Galilean origin of Christianity yet another suggestion. . . . It does not emphasize the ruling Caesar, or the ruthless moralist, or the unmoved mover. It dwells upon the tender elements in the world, which slowly and in quietness operate by love; and it finds purpose in the present immediacy of a kingdom not of this world. Love neither rules, nor is it unmoved; also it is a little oblivious as to morals.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> *Process and Reality* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1929) pp. 520-21.

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Suppose for a moment that the church means what it says. It claims that Jesus is a revelation of God. To the ordinary man this would mean that we could learn the nature of God by studying the words and deeds of Jesus. If Jesus was humble, without "the power and the glory," then this fact has something to teach us about the nature of God. If his humility was a response to God's rich benevolence, then benevolence must be near the center of God's nature.

But this is foolishness to the wise. They read the sentence backwards. If Jesus was a revelation of God, then he must be like God. We already know that God is omnipotent, omniscient, all-holy, and the absolute of absolutes. Then Jesus on earth must have been all these things. But this denies that Jesus taught us anything about God, and calls on God to teach us everything about Jesus. If the Christian God is identical with Aristotle's Unmoved Mover, then Jesus was not a revelation to the Christians.

The so-called "Infancy Gospels" give a clear ancient example of this type of repudiation of Jesus' message. These second-century gospels tell the story of Jesus' childhood and youth. Unhampered by the possession of any information, they write the story as it should have happened. They know that God has power surpassing human ability; they give less

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emphasis to God's wisdom, but he knows more than human brains can think.

So they tell us that Jesus makes sparrows out of clay, waves a stick over them, says, "Fly away!" and away they fly. Jesus helps his father in the carpenter shop, and when a beam is too short Jesus stretches it out a few feet longer. Jesus carries water in his apron. A playmate bumps into Jesus; Jesus says to him, "You'll not get where you are going!" and the boy falls down dead. A playmate falls off the roof of a building and dies; the parents accuse Jesus of killing him—what a reputation he must have had—and Jesus brings him back to life to tell his parents that it was an accident. A poisonous snake bites Jesus, but it is the snake that dies! Jesus goes to school to be taught his ABC's, but the discourse with which Jesus describes the first letter of the alphabet so impresses the teacher that he asks to be taught by Jesus.

These gospel writers knew that Jesus was divine; they knew equally well that divinity meant super-human power and knowledge. Thus they made Jesus over in the image of their God, and the Jesus who refused to work miracles and had no power to avoid the cross became a little-boy Superman, more worthy of the modern comic strips than of Christian literature.

An equally clear example of the Christian refusal

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to accept a carpenter as a revelation of God occurred on the campus of Emory University about twenty years ago. One of my teachers was addressing a gathering of Methodist clergymen. "Suppose," he said to them, "that the Gospels are right—that a carpenter without wealth or schooling or prestige was an adequate revelation of God! Could it be that this poor man was God's Messiah? We condemn the Jews because they did not accept him, but if he came to us the same way today, would we recognize him?" Immediately an indignant preacher in the front row jumped to his feet and shouted, "But he won't come that way the second time!"

The Jews knew he would not come that way the first time! They knew the messianic prophecies as well as we do. We blame them for not seeing that the carpenter was their Messiah, but we immediately strip him of all that made him Jesus. We will not accept a carpenter as our Messiah; so we require of him that as his return he come with the power and the glory with which he did not come to Israel.

To quote Whitehead again:

When the Western world accepted Christianity, Caesar conquered; and the received text of Western theology was edited by his lawyers. The code of Justinian and the theology of Justinian are two volumes expressing one movement of the human spirit. The

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brief Galilean vision of humility flickered throughout the ages, uncertainly. In the official formulation of the religion it has assumed the trivial form of the mere attribution to the Jews that they cherished a misconception about their Messiah. But the deeper idolatry, of the fashioning of God in the image of the Egyptian, Persian, and Roman imperial rulers, was retained. The Church gave unto God the attributes which belonged exclusively to Caesar.<sup>3</sup>

I have tried to say this in the following verses:

### THE SECOND COMING

*“I will not leave you comfortless, but I will come again.”*

In Francis, Jesus came again  
In humble garb and lowly mien;  
A second time he joined himself in wed-  
lock to the poor.  
And in Italian villages  
He brought the good news back again  
To the long-forgotten meek.

“The Great God is my Father,”  
Said the village carpenter, Jesus.  
“The braying ass is my brother,”  
Said the little brother, Francis.  
But kings gave no ear to his message.  
In him priests found no comforter.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 519-20.

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In our day Christ will come again—  
But not this time the humble,  
Not today the carpenter!  
This time in glory  
With heralds angelic  
To blow a fanfare celestial!

But should he come in a steel mill—  
("I am come to bring fire,"  
Said the Lamb of God, Jesus)  
("Fire is my brother,"  
Said the gentlest one, Francis),  
Would kings give ear to his message?  
Or priests find in him their comfort?

What I have been trying to say is that Jesus saw in God a love that knows no frontiers, that is a little careless of ethics—sending its rain on evil and good alike. Jesus realized that this love creates that humility which alone makes possible the service of man. Love that knows no frontiers is possible only to the humble.

## The Coming Kingdom

In the discussion of the silences in Jesus' teaching it was argued that Jesus shared with his contemporaries beliefs which he did not express. Humility was not the only virtue for man, nor benevolence the only quality of Deity. Jesus believed in God's power as revealed in creation, in the history of his people, and in the approaching Judgment.

The common world view among the Jews of Jesus' day was that human history was rushing to its conclusion, that this conclusion would be characterized by God's intervening destruction of the wicked and of the present order, and that God would establish a new order in which his will would be done on earth as it is in heaven. The results of the last generation of study make it seem probable that Jesus shared this faith and hope. The most vigorous

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attempt to eliminate this hope from Jesus' teaching is now generally conceded to be a failure.<sup>1</sup>

Let the fig tree teach you its lesson [said Jesus]. As soon as its branches grow soft and put forth leaves, you know that summer is coming. So when you see all these things, you must know that he is just at the door. I tell you, these things will all happen before the present age passes away.

(Matt. 24:32-34.)

Much of this end-of-the-world discourse (Matt. 24; Mark 13; Luke 21) may be the contribution of the community, but some of these sayings are authentic. Among these are the following: "Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other refused"; the references to the days of Noah; the insistence on the uncertainty as to the day and the hour and the consequent necessity for vigilance and preparation.

No statements are more frequently misinterpreted than the sayings about the day and the hour. Mark 13:32: "But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son; only the Father," is appealed to as evidence that Jesus did not expect the Kingdom to come in

<sup>1</sup> The effort was that of C. H. Dodd in *The Parables of the Kingdom*; C. T. Craig in his article "Realized Eschatology," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, LVI (1937), 17-26, has shown what violence must be done to the text of the Gospels in order to rule out a Kingdom of the future expected to come soon into history.

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his generation. Actually this passage and its parallels say no more than, "No one knows *exactly* when it will come." A modern preacher would say, "No man knows the minute and second," but Jesus' watch had neither a minute nor a second hand. The hour was the small, exact unit of time for Jesus and his friends.

In effect Jesus is saying that the end of the world will come very soon but only God knows the exact moment. It is this vivid expectation of the end that reinforces Jesus' exhortations to watchfulness. In the passage which immediately follows the "day and hour" passage he says:

You must look out and be on the alert, for you do not know when it will be time; just as a man when he leaves home to go on a journey, and puts his slaves in charge, each with his duties, gives orders to the watchman to keep watch. So you must be on the the watch, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming—in the evening or at midnight or toward day-break or early in the morning—for fear he should come unexpectedly and find you asleep. And what I am telling you I mean for all—Be on the watch!"

(Mark 13:33-37.)

The background of the parables of the wicked judge (Luke 18:2-7) and the importunate friend (Luke 11:5-8) is the confidence that the day of the Kingdom is really coming. "Take an example from

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your own experience," Jesus says. "If a man is taking you to court, you try to reach an agreement with him while you are still on the way there so as to avoid imprisonment." (Luke 12:57-59, paraphrased.)

Such sayings as "I tell you, some of you who stand here will certainly live to see the reign of God come in its might" (Mark 9:1; Matt. 16:28; Luke 9:27) or "You will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man arrives" (Matt. 10:23) are not the creation of the gospel-writing generation. The drinking of wine in the Kingdom (Matt. 26:29; Mark 14:25; Luke 22:18), the prediction that all these things shall come upon "this generation" (Matt. 23:34-36), the sign of Jonah as preacher of impending judgment (Matt. 16:4; 12:39), the faithful steward of Matt. 24:45-51, the original form of the parable of the virgins (Matt. 25:1-13), the "one more year" for the fig tree (Luke 13:6-9), the decision to let wheat and tares grow together till harvest (Matt. 13:24-30)—all show that Jesus shared the world view of his people and expected the Kingdom to come soon and to come in power.

At the risk of being tedious I repeat that the so-called "parables of growth" are not intended to emphasize growth or slow development at all. I have argued that the teaching of the parables of the yeast

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and of the mustard seed is that big things may come from small beginnings. Look at the one parable in which the process of growth is explicitly stated—the parable of the productive soil:

The reign of God . . . is like a man scattering seed on the ground, and then sleeping at night and getting up by day, while the seed sprouts and comes up, without his knowing it. The ground of itself is productive, putting forth first a blade, then a head, then fully developed wheat in the head. But as soon as the crop will let him, the man goes in with his sickle, for the harvest time has come.

(Mark 4:26-29.)

The emphasis here is neither on growth nor on the successive stages of growth, but on the ground's producing the grain. "God will produce the Kingdom," said Jesus, "and produce it soon."

If humility was one chair in the room in which Jesus lived, the coming Day of the Lord was another. But this chair sat in a dark corner, behind a door, and was not used much. The expectation that God would bring the present age to an end soon was not central in Jesus' thinking. It was not the focus of his thought nor the foundation of his faith. It does not dominate his teaching.

Jesus' teaching about the coming Kingdom is not extravagant in nature. There were Jews and

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“Christians” in Jesus’ lifetime and in the first generations after the cross for whom the hope of the end was central. In books of “revelation” they expressed their faith in the coming of the Kingdom. The Revelation of John in the New Testament is a book of this type. This is teaching by a man for whom the imminent judgment was central. Therefore attention is centered on the signs of the end and the nature of the rewards and punishments that the judgment will bring. In this book dragons and monstrous angels are at home. A woman is clothed in the sun, and marvels and portents crowd its pages. What appears briefly in the Gospels is related here in repetitious and tedious detail. But the Apocalypse of John is not the teaching of Jesus.

There were others who shared this apocalyptic faith in this extravagant form. Papias was one of these enthusiasts, and he did not hesitate to ascribe this teaching to Jesus:

The elders who saw John the disciple of the Lord remembered that they had heard from him how the Lord taught in regard to those times, and said: “The days will come in which vines shall grow, having each ten thousand branches, and in every branch ten thousand twigs, and in each true twig ten thousand shoots, and in every one of the shoots ten thousand clusters, and on every one of the clusters ten thousand grapes,

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and every grape when pressed will give five and twenty measures of wine. And when any one of the saints shall lay hold of a cluster, another shall cry out, 'I am a better cluster, take me; bless the Lord through me!' " In like manner [the Lord declared] that a grain of wheat would produce ten thousand ears and that every ear should have ten thousand grains and every grain would yield ten pounds of clear, pure, fine flour.<sup>2</sup>

Again a poet has caught the essence of this ancient teaching. Louis Untermeyer in his poem "Roast Leviathan"<sup>3</sup> expresses accurately the extravagance of those for whom the coming Kingdom was central. Two rabbis are discussing the final triumph of the faithful, when they shall have roast leviathan to eat. The monster is described as follows:

God's deathless plaything rolls an eye  
Five hundred thousand cubits high.  
The smallest scale upon his tail  
Could hide six dolphins and a whale.  
His nostrils breathe—and on the spot  
The churning waves turn seething hot.  
If he be hungry, one huge fin  
Drives seven thousand fishes in;

<sup>2</sup>Irenaeus *Adv. haer.* v. 33.

<sup>3</sup>From *Selected Poems and Parodies of Louis Untermeyer*, copyright 1935 by Harcourt, Brace and Company, Inc. Reprinted by permission of the publishers.

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And when he drinks what he may need,  
The rivers of the earth recede.  
Yet he is more than huge and strong—  
Twelve brilliant colors play along  
His sides until, compared to him,  
The naked, burning sun seems dim.  
New scintillating rays extend  
Through endless singing space and rise  
Into an ecstasy that cries:  
“Ascend, Leviathan, ascend!”

When the angels fail to slay him, God calls up  
Behemot as his adversary:

Behemot, sweating blood,  
Uses for his daily food  
All that fodder, flesh and juice  
That twelve tall mountains can produce.

Jordan, flooded to the brim,  
Is a single gulp to him;  
Two great streams from Paradise  
Cool his lips and scarce suffice.

When he shifts from side to side,  
Earthquakes gape and open wide;  
When a nightmare makes him snore,  
All the dead volcanoes roar.

In the space between each toe,  
Kingdoms rise and saviours go;

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Epochs fall and causes die  
In the lifting of his eye.

Wars and justice, love and death,  
These are but his wasted breath:  
Chews a planet for his cud—  
Behemot sweating blood.

The monsters in epic strife slay each other, and

*Then come the angels!*

With hoists and levers, joists and poles,  
With knives and cleavers, ropes and saws,  
Down the long slopes to the gaping maws,  
The angels hasten; hacking and carving,  
So nought will be lacking for the starving  
Chosen of God, who in frozen wonderment  
Realize now what the terrible thunder meant.  
How their mouths water while they are looking  
At miles of slaughter and sniffing the cooking!  
Whiffs of delectable fragrance swim by;  
Spice-laden vagrants that float and entice,  
Tickling the throat and brimming the eye.  
Ah! What rejoicing and crackling and roasting!  
Ah! How the boys sing as, cackling and boasting  
The angels' old wives and their nervous assistants  
Run in to serve us. . . .  
And while we are toasting  
The Fairest of All, they call from the distance—  
The rare ones of Time, they share our enjoyment  
Their only employment to bear jars of wine  
And shine like the stars in a circle of glory.

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Peace without end.

Peace will descend on us, discord will cease;  
And we, now so wretched, will lie stretched out  
Free of old doubt, on our cushions of ease.  
And, like a gold canopy over our bed,  
The skin of Leviathan, tail-tip to head,  
Soon will be spread till it covers the skies.  
Light will still rise from it; millions of bright  
Facets of brilliance, shaming the white  
Glass of the moon, inflaming the night.

So time shall pass and rest and pass again,  
Burn with an endless zest and then return,  
Walk at our side and tide us to new joys;  
God's voice to guide us, beauty as our staff  
Thus shall Life be when Death has disappeared. . . .

Jeered at? Well, let them laugh.

“Roast Leviathan,” the Apocalypse of John, the prophecy of Daniel, belong together. In each we find the same lush imagery, the same intensity of almost despairing hope, the same lurid spotlight on the curtain that falls at the end of history. But this quality does not exist in the teaching of Jesus. Jesus did not write an apocalypse.

Even the so-called “Little Apocalypse” in Mark 13 and parallels owes something to the creative ability of Jesus’ followers. All will admit that in the total tradition of Jesus’ teachings the teaching about the end of the world is only a small part of the

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whole. This is the more remarkable in view of the popularity of this belief among the Christians in the gospel-making age. It is very doubtful that the first generations of Christians would easily surrender sayings of Jesus that would confirm one of their dearest hopes. This hope reinforced by the Christian doctrine of the "Second Coming" would tend to increase the amount of Jesus' teaching on this subject. Anything that could be quoted from Jesus on this would be of great importance for validating the church's belief that Jesus was the Messiah. Hence the small amount of this teaching is the more significant. It shows that Jesus himself gave little importance to the shortness of time.

The belief that the Kingdom was coming soon does not "explain" the rigor of Jesus' teaching. The crowd of interpreters insist that it does, that it is the shortness of time that lends a note of urgency to Jesus' teaching, and that this urgency is what makes Jesus' teaching rigorous. The erroneous nature of this claim would be obvious at once to students more theologically sophisticated than New Testament scholars. These scholars imply that if Jesus had expected history to last longer, his teaching would not have been rigorous. They make of his teaching a program for a brief interim and imply that a rigorous doctrine is tolerable provided the time is short.

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Let us apply a practical test. Let us take two or three of the rigorous sayings and assume that the world will end in two months. Do these sayings lose their rigor? Is it easy to pray for them that curse you because the world will end soon? Is it easy to cast out all divisive pride for the last month of your life? Is it easy to look at women without desire because you will see them for only two months? In those periods in Christian history when the masses confidently expected the world to end soon, licentiousness increased as much as asceticism did. The classic slogan for self-indulgence is as “eschatological” as anything Jesus said. “Eat, drink, and be merry; for tomorrow we die!” shows that the shortening of history is not in itself the clue to the rigor of Jesus’ teaching.

The most rigorous of all his sayings is embedded in the Sermon on the Mount. At the close of a paragraph pleading that we do good to all men, he says: “So you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is.” (Matt. 5:48.) The extravagance of this utterance is rooted in its reference to God. You are to do good to all men, he said, not because the time is short, but because God makes his sun rise on bad and good alike. Jesus proclaimed God’s will. God willed that men should show themselves to be his true sons by putting his will first in their lives. It is the nature of Jesus’ intuition of God that adds

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the note of intensity and challenge to his message.

Amos Wilder's thorough study of *Eschatology and Ethics in the Teaching of Jesus* contains this clear statement:

The nearness of the Kingdom of Heaven, viewed both as promise and as menace, is the dominant sanction for righteousness.

This dominant eschatological sanction is, however, a formal sanction, only, secondary to, if closely related to the essential sanction.

The essential sanction for righteousness is the nature of God.

The essential sanction represents an appeal simply to the reason and discernment, to the God-conscious moral nature of men, assisted by the witness of Scripture and the example and authority of Jesus.

The formal sanction represents an appeal to self-interest in view of the rewards and punishments that are to follow on the Judgment; and, incidentally, that are to be present in a degree in the present interim, which is a phase of the messianic times, in which the Kingdom of God is already present in a sense.<sup>4</sup>

This scholar recognizes that the imperative mood of Jesus' teaching carries with it an immediate obligation and an immediate promise. The Beatitudes bless people now as well as in the future. Again and again Jesus exhorts and commands people to do something and do it now.

<sup>4</sup>Pp. 153-54. Copyright 1939 by Harper & Brothers.

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As he said this, a woman in the crowd raised her voice and said to him.

“Blessed is the mother who bore you and nursed you!”

But he said,

“You might better say, ‘Blessed are those who hear God’s message and observe it!’”

(Luke 11:27-28.)

The parable of the builders cries out that *doing* the will of God is the only foundation rock on which to build one’s house. (Matt. 7:24-27.) “If anyone wants to follow me, he must deny himself and follow me.” (Mark 8:34, after MS 2427.)

Love your enemies! Turn the other cheek! Do not be anxious for your living! All these are spoken in the present tense. They involve doing something in this age.

The “something” is more than legalistic obedience to the Scriptures. However much of the contrast between the Law and the teaching of Jesus is due to Matthew’s editorial skill in the first part of the Sermon on the Mount, more is due to Jesus’ radical teaching. People had been told by Scripture not to swear a false oath; Jesus urged them to say “yes” or “no” and mean it. He pointed out that otherwise they were already condemned.

The emphasis on “inwardness” in the teaching of Jesus often obscures these present-tense impera-

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tives. But it was by their fruit that trees were to be known. (Matt. 7:16; Luke 6:44.) The lamp is lighted to be put on a lampstand so that people may see the good works and glorify God. (Matt. 5:15; Mark 4:21; Luke 11:33.) There was in his teaching, you remember, a city that was set on a hill. (Matt. 5:14.) The stones for its walls were carried or dragged up the steep slopes of that hill in this age—not in the Kingdom to come! Thus the corruption of man that comes not from without but from the heart is a corruption that is to be avoided before the Day of Judgment. The oppressors who are to be helped oppress us now, before the day of God's wrath.

Revelation of God in Judaism—in the Old Testament and in the New—is revelation of what to do. It is therefore natural that many of Jesus' sayings and teachings are cast in the imperative mood. They require doing. They are meaningless unless they lead to new attitudes or bear fruit in action. "Look!" the crowd says to Jesus. "Your mother and your brothers are outside asking for you." Jesus replies: "Whoever does the will of God is my mother and sister and brother." (Mark 3:32, 35.)

We are not justified in claiming that these commands addressed to individual men constitute a social gospel. But we can claim that this is a message addressed to man in society. Moreover, the man to

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whom Jesus spoke lives in this society and not in an angelic company outside this world. Jesus was not a preacher of quietism, nor did he urge upon men that they withdraw from the world so that they might be with God.

The truth of this is apparent in the sharp contrast between Jesus' stories and the stories of those Christian ascetics who in the early centuries fled to the desert. Literally tens of thousands of hermits built their cells in the deserts of Egypt, Palestine, and Syria. "Since I could not live with God and man," said one of the fathers, "I chose to live with God." "Alone to the Alone" was the text by which they lived.

A certain one told this story: There were three earnest men, that loved one another, and they became monks. And one of them chose to bring to accord such as take the law of each other, according to that which is written: Blessed are the peace-makers. The second chose to visit the sick. But the third went away to be quiet in solitude. Now the first, toiling amid the contentions of men, was not able to appease them all. And overcome with weariness, he came to him who tended the sick, and found him also failing in spirit, and unable to carry out his purpose. And the two agreed together and went away to see him who had withdrawn into the desert, and they told him their tribulations. And they asked him to tell them how he himself had fared. And he was silent for awhile, and

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then poured water into a vessel and said, "Look upon the water." And it was murky. And after a little while he said again, "Look now, how clear the water has become." And as they looked into the water they saw their own faces, as in a mirror. And then he said to them, "So is he who abides in the midst of men: because of the turbulence, he sees not his sins: but when he hath been quiet, above all in solitude, then does he recognize his own default."<sup>5</sup>

Contrast this with your memories of the story of a man who went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves. An enemy alien rescued him and took care of him, and Jesus said that this is what is meant by the second great commandment, that one should love his neighbor as himself. Jesus asked people to *do* the will of God.

Jesus believed that the will of God was to be done in society, not in withdrawal from it. Thus he went from village to village, from wedding party to funeral procession, from farmer to fisherman. He sought people, not solitude.

John the Baptizer is the ideal foil to Jesus. John withdrew to the wilderness. If people wanted to escape the doom of the coming Day of the Lord, let them seek him out. John is almost ascetic in his austerity. But the basis of his austerity is not the

<sup>5</sup> Helen Waddell, *The Desert Fathers* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1936), pp. 92-93.

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asceticism of a dualism that repudiates the flesh. He lives as he does under the shadows cast by the flaming Day of Judgment. The pleasures of the senses are scorched off him. He stands blazing in the wilderness and shouts, "Fire!"

Here is interim ethics. This is consistent eschatology.

John says: You offspring of snakes! Who showed you that you should flee from the approaching wrath? . . . Already the ax is laid at the root of the tree. Any tree that fails to produce good fruit is going to be cut down and thrown into the fire. . . . I baptize you in water, but the mightier one is coming who will baptize you in fire. . . . His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clean up his threshing floor and store his wheat in his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with inextinguishable fire.

(Matt. 3:7-12 edited for emphasis.)

This is the child of Amos and Elijah, fanatical hermit, prophet of doom, who saw the Day of the Lord as deep darkness with no light in it save that which came from the flame of God's wrath. But this is John the Baptist and not Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus was no wilderness dweller, and he was more than a prophet of approaching judgment.

The contrast between Jesus and the Baptist is an illuminating one. It was first expressed by Jesus.

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“John” he said, “came neither eating nor drinking; and people said, ‘He has a demon.’ I came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘A gluttonous man and a drunkard.’” (Matt. 11:18-19, paraphrased.) The crowds that became interested in Jesus were puzzled because the disciples of John fasted but Jesus’ disciples did not.

The Baptist withdrew austerity from society; Jesus did not. John proclaimed a new baptism for those who would escape the approaching doom; Jesus did not. John’s message was a consuming fire, but Jesus’ words contain many sayings which cannot be read by the light of those flames. The man from Nazareth had something more than doom to pronounce.

## The Present Kingdom

In some sense the Kingdom was present in Jesus' work and the response which it won. It is most probable that Jesus' own sense of mission was defined with reference to the Kingdom in the present as well as the future. Jesus offered the Kingdom to his hearers. The figures of the pearl and of the hidden treasure float in a vacuum unless we can get the Kingdom now.

I am aware of the peril of modernizing Jesus. Yet the insight of A. N. Whitehead seems to me to be relevant here. He speaks of a kingdom of God that exists in two tenses.

Religion is the vision of something which stands beyond, behind, and within, the passing flux of immediate things; something which is real, and yet waiting to be realized; something which is a remote possibility, and yet the greatest of present facts; something that gives meaning to all that passes, and yet

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eludes apprehension; something whose possession is the final good, and yet is beyond all reach: something which is the ultimate ideal, and the hopeless quest.<sup>1</sup>

The Kingdom existed in two tenses in the mind of Jesus. The future Kingdom's presence there is now generally admitted. In some sense the present Kingdom was there too, and evidence of this is in the Gospels.

In its original form the saying about accepting the Kingdom as a little child does may well have carried this implication of a present opportunity. "Verily I say to you, Whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God as a little child shall not enter into it." (Mark 10:15; Luke 18:17, trans. mine.) We have learned from Victorian and middle-class sentimentalists to think of children in unreal terms. Thus this saying conjures up for us pictures of clean, gentle, demure, well-mannered children who take the Kingdom politely and say a low-voiced "thank you" to God.

But this is not the way little children take a gift. They sidle up to the giver, casting suspicious glances to right and left; and when they are within reaching distance, they grab it and run! "Take the Kingdom like that," said Jesus. "Clutch it to your bosom; run

<sup>1</sup> *Science and the Modern World* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1925), p. 275.

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to your own room with it. It is the treasure beyond compare, and God offers it to you!"

If Jesus expected, as all admit he did, that the Kingdom would come in power in the future, how could he regard it as present? Could he not regard his work and the response to it as an insignificant beginning of the Kingdom? The parables of the yeast and the mustard seed have exactly this point. They are parables of insignificance. They argue that the insignificant beginning is of the same stuff as the great climax. The yeast is yeast even when it is only a spoonful. The seed and the tree are both mustard. The smallness of the seed does not prevent it from being mustard. Neither does the insignificance of Jesus' career, the lack of "power and glory," mean that the Kingdom is not there.

The urgency of the message of Jesus is best explained by this aspect of the Kingdom. It is not because the day of wrath approaches that the teaching is hard. It is not because his ethic is the ethic that is to be lived in the perfect Kingdom once it is established in power. The teaching is hard because to people living in this world Jesus said: "This is the nature of God, and his will is that you should be his true sons."

Here is the granite core of Jesus' teaching. The difficulty of the individual sayings derives from this bare, unqualified proclamation of God's will. We

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moderns look for the pattern of compromise. Is it not "interim ethic"? Or teaching for the clergy only—a disciple ethic? But Jesus provides no formula of accommodation to dilute the divine will as he saw it to the thin substance of our society's good. Yet he said to people, "Be mastered by this will! Be ruled by this God!" and he meant "Now!"

Jesus' teachings are not teachings for people who have "gone to heaven," nor are they teachings that will apply "when the Kingdom comes in power." The second mile, the lost sheep, and the good Samaritan have no relevance there.

Jesus' teaching is not to be explained away as esoteric teaching—instruction for the little group of professionals. If ever a man spoke to the amateurs and attacked professionalism in religion, it was the Carpenter of Nazareth. Mark's silly explanation of the use of parables as disguise is denied by the transparency of the parables themselves. They furnish no more concealment than cellophane does. Everything Jesus said and did exhorted man to obey God rather than the priest, to please God rather than the rabbi. This teaching is not suited to the needs of a clerical order, an apostolate, a priesthood, or anything of the kind. Jesus spoke not to scribes and priests but to man. And his message is cast in a familiar time pattern: "Today—if you will hear his voice."

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Modern man rejects the concept of a Kingdom to come out of the clouds in power. He does well to reject it. If two thousand years of Christian history have taught us anything, they have taught us that this is a vain hope.

Yet when the modern man tears this hope of the coming Kingdom out of the teaching of Jesus, the whole fabric is torn and the pattern is mutilated. The coming Kingdom was a social doctrine, and it rested on a conception of history without which any presentation of Jesus' teaching is distorted and futile.

The social nature of this hope is often overlooked. But it will be clear to even the casual reader that the coming Kingdom is coming to society as a whole. It will not happen to isolated individuals or a small group. It ends this age and begins a new one. In that new age justice and righteousness shall reign. The evil shall be destroyed. God's will shall be done on earth as it is in heaven. The modern Christian is wrong when he presents Jesus as proclaiming an ideal whose *only* power is its attractive force. He also heralded a Kingdom that would come *in might* so that the wheat would be gathered into barns but the chaff consumed in fire.

The ideal that is its own power has a fascination for many religious leaders today. They react against the cult of brutality, an old cult perennially revived

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by those who strive for power without justification. They turn blindly from the ever-increasing brutality and callousness and destructive power of war to glorify a forceless deity. They paint again the golden dreams of the prophets and the ideals of personal righteousness found in the Sermon on the Mount. They urge the compelling power of these ideals, and as far as they go they do well. The prophets' dream that the desert should blossom like the rose, that swords should be beaten into plowshares, is not valueless today. One of the responsibilities of the heirs of the great tradition is to keep these great ideals alive, for by their very existence as ideals they affect the real and draw men toward their goals.

Shortly before the last war started I read Isaiah again and wrote these verses:

### DREAM THIS DREAM

The lion and the lamb shall lie down together;  
The kid and the panther shall play in the sun;  
No one shall know the strange word "soldier";  
And war shall be a shameful deed that long ago was  
done.

And rest for the weary,  
And food for the hungry,  
And peace for the comfortless  
Shall not be far to seek!

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And beauty in labor,  
And beauty in laughter,  
And beauty in loving  
Shall come to the meek!

Mountain calls to mountain top—  
Sinai unto Calvary—  
Whispers rise from ancient fields,  
They push up through the sod:  
“Tell all the children  
To tell their children’s children  
To dream this dream for God.”

Yet all the prophets counted on more than the attractive power of the ideal they expressed. They counted on God, and so did Jesus. The golden day that was coming was the Day of the Lord. It was the Lord who would bring it to pass. He would force it upon men. His day would not be universally welcomed, for to a wicked people it would be darkness and not light—even deep darkness and no light in it. God or his Messiah would come riding on the clouds of heaven to judge the world.

Modern ministers who preach a personal gospel only are proclaiming a mutilated gospel. They take divine tenderness and make it impotent. They tear justice out of God’s concern and banish God himself from human history. Pulpit orators who in the name of Jesus prefer love to justice have thrown away his faith in the coming Kingdom and have

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not bothered to replace it. They are like a near-sighted man whose glasses were by error prescribed for astigmatism. He becomes convinced that his glasses distort the world, throws them away, and stumbles on—a blind leader of the blind—incapable of perspective.

Jesus, like his Jewish ancestors and neighbors, believed firmly that history was in God's hands, or that God's mighty hands were thrust into history up to the elbow. The particular formulation of that faith as an expectation of a Day of Judgment and Kingdom Come can be false without falsifying the faith. This faith sees God as a power in the structure of events, forcing them to judgment and helping them to fulfillment.

Jesus said to the leaders of his people:

Did you never read in the Scriptures,

“That stone which the builders rejected  
Has become the cornerstone;  
This came from the Lord,  
And seems marvelous to us”?

That, I tell you, is why the Kingdom of God will be taken away from you, and given to a people that will produce its proper fruit. Whoever falls on that stone will be shattered, but whoever it falls upon will be pulverized.

(Matt. 21:42-44.)

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Thus Jesus' proclamation of the nature of God is more than the painting of an ideal to which men may or may not be attracted. It is the delineation of the ultimate reality which is a part of the fabric and a part of the pattern of living. To Jesus the man who rejects God does more than deprive himself of some "plus," some extra value in the goods of living. The man who rejects God, says Jesus, will inevitably suffer. For God's arm is a mighty one, and it is active, building in history not our pattern but God's. The Rock of our salvation is a shattering and pulverizing stone to those who oppose his plans.

Jesus pleads with his hearers: "Go in at the narrow gate. For the road that leads to destruction is broad and spacious, and there are many who go in by it. But the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few that find it." (Matt. 7:13-14.) God builds both those gates. He is the judge as well as the prodigal father. Because Jesus knows that God is an inexorable judge in human history, he weeps over a Jerusalem that murders the prophets and stones those that are sent to her. God will leave her house desolate.

But God was more than judge to Jesus. God was also sustaining and creative power. The faith that God will bring his Kingdom in was announced as good news. The graciousness of God offers us the

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Kingdom as a present resource as well as the ultimate dream. The power of the Kingdom is not something strange, not the alien armies of heaven, but a real power—active now in this world—a resource available to people who will squeeze through a narrow gate to find it. Our Christian imaginations have been too long debauched with celestial earthquakes, falling stars, mysterious monsters, and bizarre miracles. We cannot see the God who is available. We equip ourselves with great telescopes with which we search the skies a hundred million light-years away. We point them at the future and seek for the signs of the end. We discuss the doctrine of the end, or eschatology, until we have created a new abstraction with its own technical lingo to obscure its instability and irrelevance. We have since Albert Schweitzer's epochal book<sup>2</sup> leaned so heavily on New Testament eschatology that we have squashed it out of shape. All our technical adjectives are a confession of distortion—"consistent eschatology" and "realized eschatology" are not New Testament eschatology. The eschatology which our current crop of theologians is finding for us is not even an anachronism.

It says, in effect, that the early Christians were wrong in their time expectation but that time ex-

<sup>2</sup> *The Quest of the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of Its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede* (London: A. & C. Black, 1910).

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pectation is the crucial thing. Those early Christians—we are rightly told—were mistaken in the date they set for the end of the world. But we are then urged to make belief in the same sort of end central to our faith. These men are chewing the peeling of an apple they have thrown away.

Jesus' eschatology, or faith in the Kingdom to come, was not rooted in some logical or metaphysical necessity for an end. It fed on the conviction that God was in history, working constructively. It had the wrong timetable, and the wrong program of installation, but the right faith.

In the novel *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoevski dramatically presents the implications of losing this particular faith. The author presents an interview between a Catholic cardinal, the "Grand Inquisitor," and a Jesus who has returned to earth, to Seville in the days of the Inquisition.

Dostoevski's Grand Inquisitor and his church have accepted Satan. He is logical in this because he does not have God to offer to people as a resource. Therefore he offers them miracle, mystery, and authority—the power and the glory of an alien world. The arrogant cardinal attacks the quiet Jesus and upbraids him for not taking what the devil offered him in the wilderness! Yet at the end of the tirade one feels that the humility and the

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graciousness of Jesus carry more real power because they are with God.

The Kingdom has a single tense today, and that is Now! No kingdom is coming in power from the clouds. The end-of-the-world hope is a vain hope. Yet why should we fear to discard it? We have access not only to the power that was *in* Jesus but to the power on which he relied—the power that supported his work. If we had a faith in God similar to his, if we knew a God of grace and power, we could plant a mustard seed; we could help a desolate world to find the narrow gate that leads to its salvation.

Jesus used to rebuke his followers with an epithet that makes a beautiful mouthful of syllables in the Greek: *δλιγόπιστοι*—“you men of little faith!” Why are you afraid? “Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” (Luke 12:32 A.S.V.)

Some of the people who heard Jesus say this believed him. In some strange way they were convinced that this man knew what God’s will was. In some way now lost to us Jesus saw his own work related to God’s Kingdom. His followers saw this relationship in various ways. Some thought he was a prophet; some believed he was a Davidic Messiah; all believed after the resurrection experiences that he was the “Son of Man” Messiah to come in the

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clouds of heaven. But the resurrection experiences did not create that faith; they gave it a new definition. Faith in Jesus as a figure of epochal importance was born in his lifetime, before the cross. Without it the resurrection experiences would not have been possible.

Around that faith there grew a community. In this community—long before the crucifixion—the Christian society was born. This society in time became churches. Under the impulse of the resurrection experiences it became aggressively missionary. But it all began in the days of his flesh when he challenged men to believe in a God of grace and power.



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